TWENTY

SERMONS

ON

VARIOUS SUBJECTS,

PREACHED AT

ALHALLOWS ON THE WALL.

BY THE

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TO

THE WORTHY RECTOR,

CHURCHWARDENS, OVERSEERS, AND

INHABITANTS

OF THE PARISH OF

ALHALLOWS ON THE WALL, LONDON,

THESE SERMONS,

PREACHED IN THEIR CHURCH,

ARE,

AS A SINCERE TESTIMONY OF RESPECT AND

GRATITUDE,

MOST HUMBLY DEDICATED,

BY

THEIR MOST OBLIGED

AND OBEDIENT HUMBLE SERVANT,

W. DRAPER.

BRITISH MUSEUM

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SERMON I.

NEW YEAR'S-DAY.

PSALM cxix. 5, 6.

Oh that my Ways were directed to keep thy Statutes: Then *ſhall I not be aſhamed when I have reſpect unto all thy Commandments.*

TO the rational and reflective mind, the voice of Wiſdom ſounds in a thouſand gentle, but ſignificant whiſpers, which are totally unnoticed by thoſe anxiouſly engaged in the acquiſition of wealth, or the enjoyment of pleaſure.

The various occurrences of life, and unceaſing revolutions of time, appear as neceſſary monitors, which the Providence of

God hath afforded, to remind us of the frail tenure by which we hold all our temporal poſſeſſions, and even life itſelf.

However lawful and neceſſary the employment we purſue, however innocent the amuſements in which we indulge; they ought not wholly to engroſs the thoughts and ſwallow up the affections of an immortal being. To prepare for eternity, we muſt frequently in ſpirit detatch ourſelves from this vain world, and (like David) commune with our own hearts in our chamber and be ſtill. Retirement and reflection will weaken the undue influence of paſſion, ſupport the authority of reaſon, and awaken in our boſoms a thouſand ſalutary ſenſations, which meliorate the heart and improve the underſtanding.

When we look inward, we ſhall diſcern much weakneſs and many imperfections, which in the buſtle of buſineſs and tumult of pleaſure had eſcaped our notice; and if in the hour of ſolitude, and with the ſteady eye of contemplation, we ſurvey external objects,

objects, we ſhall ſoon diſcern thoſe radical defects which will inevitably abate our ardour for ſublunary enjoyments, and inſpire the ſoul with ſuperior deſires.

To trace with the coolneſs of reaſon our paſt actions, to examine with a ſtrict ſcrutiny our preſent ſituation, and upon the cleareſt and moſt extenſive view of the whole to determine our future conduct, is at all ſeaſons an employment proper and profitable. But the preſent calls upon us with peculiar propriety for ſuch an exerciſe: we are now looking back upon an *old* and forward upon a *new* year; we have now in our common calendar a memorable note of the perpetual flux of time, and an awful warning that however we may loiter in our ſpiritual race, our temporal ſuffers no ceſſation; we are daily growing older, if we are not becoming wiſer; and approaching towards the gates of death, if we are not advancing towards the kingdom of heaven.

There is not a more powerful incentive to diligence in religious duty and virtuous

exercise than the rapidity of time; the life of man does not consist of many years, and those swift in their course, and when once flown, seem as a tale that is told.

The longest duration, when past, appears like a point, and tho' the coming hour, when it delays our wishes, may seem tedious, yet the retrospect of days, months, and years, diminish almost to nothing.

Where are now the pleasing or painful seasons we have lately enjoyed or endured; where the vernal flowers, the summer suns, or the autumnal fruits of the last year? Mown down by the rapacious scythe of time, they are now mingled together in almost an undistinguishable mass; the joys that elated our bosoms, and the cares that contracted our brows, are either confounded in the same forgetfulness, or at least seem equally unworthy of retention. But tho', considered in themselves, the late occurrences of our lives, whether prosperous or adverse, may appear vain and insignificant, yet,

yet, as rational beings, who are to form our future conduct by the experience of the paſt, a retroſpect of our actions is not vain but ſalutary; as it may convince us, by the failure of our expectations, and the diſappointment of our views, of the neceſſity of regulating our lives by ſtricter principles, watching over paſſion with greater attention, and ſurrendering our wills to a ſafer guide.

Reflexions of this nature ſeem to have taken place in the breaſt of the divine Pſalmiſt, and to have induced him to utter the holy exclamation and devout wiſh contained in the text.—" Oh that my ways " were directed to keep thy ſtatutes!"— And in this view theſe words are expreſſive of a truly pious mind under a powerful impreſſion of the excellence and ſufficiency of the divine commands, and the weakneſs and inconſiſtency of every other rule of conduct. The warmth of feeling with which it was uttered, evidences that the affections as well as the underſtanding were engaged in the exerciſe: and that David's

was not merely a religion of the head, but of the heart: it includes not only a clear conviction of the truth and importance of the ſacred code, but conveys at the ſame time a ſtrong determination, to embrace and adopt the divine precepts as an actual rule of life: and the concluding ſentence is expreſſive of the full and holy confidence, which reſults from a ſincere and univerſal obedience, at leaſt in mind, to all the requiſitions of God's law.

Thus, while the language requires not much explanation, the excellence and propriety of the ſentiment will furniſh us with ſeveral obſervations both reaſonable and ſalutary.

Firſt, we may collect from the earneſt and pathetic manner in which the Pſalmiſt expreſſes himſelf, that religion ſhould be a warm feeling of the heart, and not an inanimate conſent to a ſet of truths, about whoſe operation we are wholly indifferent.

Whoever

Whoever complies with ſacred ordinances merely as a thing of courſe, a ſacrifice to public decency, and a proper ſubmiſſion to cuſtom and authority, is ignorant of the true nature of religion, and a ſtranger to its divine effects.

Thoſe who are influenced by the genuine principles of devotion, who really worſhip the Father in ſpirit and in truth, feel it the *firſt* wiſh of their heart to be reconciled unto God; are anxious to be freed, not only from the puniſhment, but from the dominion of ſin; are daily urgent with the Almighty for aſſiſtance and direction, and ardently ſtrive more and more to ſurrender themſelves, ſoul and body, "a living and "acceptable ſacrifice to God, through "Chriſt."

Of the lively and ſincere Chriſtian, David was as ſtriking an example, as the Phariſees were of the dead and formal profeſſor: the Phariſee having complied with the empty forms of external worſhip, eſteemed his religion complete, aſſumed a falſe conſe-

quence upon the number and punctuality of his performances, and, in his conduct at leaſt, ſaid to the world at large, who were not ſo ſcrupulous in ceremonials,— "ſtand by thyſelf, for *I* am holier than *thou*."

But this, though it inflated the breaſt of the hypocrite with ſelf-ſufficiency, and claimed a veneration from the vulgar and profane, was not accepted as religion in the ſight of God, but met with the ſevereſt rebukes even from the mild lips of our Saviour himſelf.

And David had purer notions of religion than to ſuppoſe it conſiſted merely in proſtrations of the body, animal ſacrifices, or the length of prayers; he, beholding theſe in their juſt light, as helps to our weakneſs and means of acquiring and expreſſing religious feeling, is conſtantly employed in nobler and more ſpiritual exerciſes; he is often found lamenting the depravity of his nature; with the greateſt humility acknowledging the iniquity of his paſt life; expreſſing, with the utmoſt joyfulneſs, his confidence

confidence in God; and ardently longing to be conformed in the image of his mind to the divine likeneſs. The ſtrongeſt natural feelings are uſed, as expreſſive of his ardent deſire of receiving the mercy, and partaking of the holineſs of his Almighty Maker.—" As the hart panteth for the " water brook, ſo panteth my ſoul after " thee, O God!"

This was the religion that made David the object of divine favour; and this muſt be the religion that will obtain for us the ſame bleſſing; we muſt behold it as " the " *one* thing needful, as the pearl of great " price;" we muſt have ſuch a ſenſe of the excellence and ſpirituality of the Goſpel diſpenſation, as will inſpire us with the ſtrongeſt deſire to have our mind and will regulated by its precepts, and purified by its principles.

But 2dly, We may obſerve, that David acknowledges his own inſufficiency to work this change in his heart, or procure this conformity to the divine Will; for he ſays,

" Oh

" Oh that my ways were *directed* to keep " thy ſtatutes;" tho' the expreſſion ſhews the moſt ardent wiſh, and therefore we may conclude, that he would omit nothing in his power neceſſary to procure the important bleſſing, yet he does not truſt in his own ſtrength, make vain reſolutions independent of Almighty aſſiſtance; but ſeems to include the neceſſity of ſuperior help.

This is conſiſtent with that humility which ever marked his character, and is conformable to his conſtant requiſitions to God for his guidance; thus, while the perfect nature of the ſacred law engages his affections, while he admires it as the only complete rule of life and ſure way to felicity, he ſtrongly indicates that the aſſiſtance of the ſame God who framed the divine directory is neceſſary to lead us into its true meaning, and ſtrengthen our deſires of obedience by continual ſupport. It is one of the common failings of youth, to ſuppoſe that by the vigor of their own exertions they are capable of every thing; and hence when they diſcern the excellence of

religion, and the evil of ſin, they form immediate reſolutions grounded ſolely on their own ſtrength, overlooking the neceſſity of divine aid; and when experience demonſtrates the inefficacy of their efforts, they then bound to the other extreme, and deem every thing impracticable which they have not been able to accompliſh; and thus are they hurried at one time by ignorant and unprofitable zeal to attempt impoſſibilities, and at another totally to relax their endeavours after ſelf-government; but in both theſe, as our Saviour ſays, they err, not knowing the Scriptures and the power of God; for tho' of ourſelves we can do nothing, yet by the aſſiſtance of the Almighty, and that aſſiſtance is at hand, we can do all things neceſſary for repentance and reformation.

Therefore, when we ſee the advantage of religion, and the neceſſity of conformity to the divine law, we ſhould avail ourſelves of the excellent example of the Pſalmiſt, and, while we form the moſt firm and ſteady reſolutions to comply with the will of our heavenly

heavenly Father, have alſo an eye to his aſſiſtance; and with a mixture of earneſt deſire, ſtrong reſolve, and humble dependance, adopt the words of the text, and ſay, "Oh that my ways were directed to "keep thy ſtatutes."

But the laſt obſervation ariſing from the text is, that ſome, while they are inclined to receive and obey the laws of the Almighty in general, and revere them as a ſacred and excellent ſyſtem, yet yield not, even in their mind, a complete obedience to the whole, but roll ſin in ſome form or other as a ſweet morſel under the tongue.

Of the danger of this David ſeems fully aware, and will not ſuffer himſelf to claim the leaſt exception, knowing that that ſecurity from evil, and confidence in God which he ſeeks, can only be the reſult of a full and unreſerved acquieſcence, at leaſt in principle, to all the commandments of God. "Then (ſays he) ſhall I not be aſhamed "when I have reſpect unto *all* thy com-"mandments." But nothing is more com-

mon

mon than to ſubſtitute, a partial, inſtead of an univerſal obedience to the requiſitions of the Goſpel. And becauſe we comply with what is moſt agreeable to our inclinations, and convenient to our ſituations, to ſuppoſe that we are obeying God, when a lower and more unworthy motive influences our conduct; there are ſome laws in every ſituation which we cannot be even tempted to violate, but which our natural diſpoſition and temporal intereſt induce us readily to accept for our own rule of conduct, and ſtrongly to enforce as obligatory on the reſt of mankind; while there are other commands which we either overlook or attempt to explain away; becauſe to comply requires much ſelf-denial and internal ſtruggle againſt the prevalence of evil paſſions. The ſincere Chriſtian, when this is the caſe, will not make a reſerve of what ſuits his ſenſual indulgence, but will chearfully ſacrifice to the will of God whatever pleaſures or inclinations may come in competition with his duty; he will, like David, have reſpect to all the commandments of God, and, by his example, diligently

examine

examine his own heart, enquire what way of wickedneſs there is in him, and pray to be cleanſed from his ſecret faults; he will wreſtle againſt the ſin which in St. Paul's words is ſaid moſt eaſily to beſet him, convinced that it is not ſufficient to avoid ſome evils, while we indulge others of equal magnitude and malignity.

To illuſtrate this, we have only to attend to the practice of the world; who all are ready to condemn ſin in general, and inveigh loudly againſt the vices of the age, or the faults of individuals. But if we cloſely examine, they are doing little more than condemning thoſe ſins which by age, conſtitution, and circumſtances they are not even tempted to commit; and extenuate or overlook thoſe to which they are by nature or ſituation inclined, and of which they are really guilty; for inſtance, the profligacy, the idleneſs, and diſhoneſty of the poor is a common topic with the rich, and the praiſe of decency and integrity magnified in the higheſt degree: honeſty, it is true, is an eſſential in Chriſtianity, and "thou

"ſhalt

"ſhalt not ſteal," a divine command; but to the rich is no ſacrifice, ſcarcely entitled to praiſe, as their own intereſt, pleaſure, and reputation in the world induce them to keep it inviolate; it is a virtue, by the adherence to which their temporal poſſeſſions are ſecure, and by the infraction they have nothing to gain. A law againſt theft is a barrier that the worſt rich man is willing to erect, to guard his property from depredation. In like manner the poor are apt to overlook the ſtrictneſs of integrity, and keep their eye upon the proud and avaricious as the greateſt ſinners; to praiſe the exertion of Charity and benevolence; becauſe by theſe they are benefited; and, as they cannot be tempted by their ſituation to be proud or arrogant, it is plain that humility and lowlineſs is with them but a ſlender virtue; and yet this is the partial view they take of the Goſpel, and, like others, are ſatisfied with obeying thoſe laws they have no temptation to infringe.

The aged are apt to behold with too much aſperity and rancour the extravagance of

of youth, and condemn it as the greateſt deviation from virtue: while the young, inattentive to their own follies, eſteem impatience and avarice (too common at the cloſe of life) as conſiderable crimes.

David could not ſo eaſily ſatisfy *his* conſcience; he knew a time would come when he ſhould be aſhamed of ſuch an intereſted ſervice; when he ſhould be put to confuſion for ever, if he had only given this imperfect and partial obedience to the laws of God.

But, on the other hand, he is aſſured, that if he has reſpect unto all the commandments, then he ſhall never be confounded. Evils in this life he knew muſt come; but with purity of heart he could either repel or endure them: the valley of death muſt be trod, but then he had a ſtaff in poſſeſſion ſufficient to ſupport him.

It is therefore our true intereſt, if we regard our eternal peace, to receive the commands of God, not as they ſuit our temporal

temporal convenience, or ſquare with our preſent inclination; but as a pure and perfect ſyſtem, calculated to regulate our whole conduct, and productive of our higheſt felicity.

We ſhould admire them for their excellence, be thankful for their communication, and embrace them without reſerve or exception.

Our ſervices at beſt muſt be imperfect, but they may be performed with ſincerity; we cannot, it is true, in practice perfectly fulfil any of the divine precepts, but we may aim at a full conformity, and thereby render our deviations leſs and leſs diſtant from perfect rectitude.

Infirmity will cleave unto the fleſh, but the mind, endowed with reaſon, enlightened by the Goſpel, and invigorated by Grace, may acquire a purity of intention, and humility of diſpoſition, that will fit it for exalted and angelic felicity in a ſuperior world: but this is not the whole of the

 bleſſing,

bleſſing, as things diſtant have but a faint operation upon the feelings of men, the Almighty has wiſely and mercifully conſtituted his laws to bleſs mankind in this world as well as the next; and though our final reward will be eternal bliſs, our preſent encouragement is temporal tranquility. Immediate happineſs for ourſelves is at all times a general wiſh; at the preſent ſeaſon it is cuſtomary to wiſh it to others; this is an innocent and a laudable practice; let it be thoroughly underſtood, and accompanied with ſincerity, and I heartily and publicly join in the general congratulation; but I feel it a truth, and it is my duty to warn you, that to be happy you muſt be good; the order of nature, and the will of God, forbid that the end (even in a ſingle inſtance) ſhould be ſeparated from the means.

The very word happineſs is a ſound pleaſing to the human ear; and at the repetition, the vain imaginations of men immediately aſſemble riches and grandeur, pleaſures and honor, as its conſtituent parts; but

but the thoughts of God are not as the thoughts of man; the happineſs to which he in his word directs us, is of a ſuperior nature, and derived from a purer ſource; the rich are there repreſented as ſtanding on a ſlippery pinnacle, and the pious Agur prays to be preſerved from the dangerous ſituation. The gay and luxurious are in the midſt of ſnares, and therefore the wiſe, inſtead of rioting in ſenſual indulgence, eſteem it a ſpecies of madneſs, and are anxious to eſcape. The happy man in the oracles of truth is deſcribed in very different colours; he may it is true poſſeſs both riches and honors, but if he does, they do not conſtitute his felicity; he has higher future hopes and better preſent poſſeſſions. A happy man is a great character, and it is with diffidence and veneration that I attempt to deſcribe it; but I will give you a few neceſſary and leading particulars: his chief dependence is on God; his purſuit is peace and purity; his guide is conſcience; his general feeling devotion to his maker and love to mankind; and his conſtant practice, juſtice and benevolence.

Such an one cannot be miſerable, to ſuch the lowly cottage is a comfortable dwelling, the homely meal a ſavory refreſhment: riches are the means of doing good; poverty is a ſkreen from luxury and vice; neceſſary labor is a pleaſing employment, and even want an acceptable exerciſe of patience; ſickneſs is beheld as a ſignal for departure, and death becomes a meſſenger of joy.

To a man whoſe mind is regulated by divine wiſdom, and at peace with God, what can happen to diſturb his tranquility or deſtroy his hopes? No evil, ſaith the Almighty, ſhall happen to the juſt—he ſhall be bold even in that day, when the great Judge advances to acquit the righteous and condemn the wicked; when every earthly ſupport ſhall be removed, every deception of the heart made manifeſt, and the diſtinctions of time ſwallowed up in the immenſity of eternity.

SERMON II.

PROV. xii. 21.

There ſhall no Evil happen to the Juſt, but the Wicked ſhall be filled with Miſchief.

MANY, when they have taken a ſurvey of human life, and obſerved how ſhort and precarious are its beſt enjoyments, how numerous and weighty its evils, have been at a loſs to account how a wiſe and benevolent God could place a rational and intelligent being, in a ſituation where the cares ſo conſiderably overbalance the comforts: and, from a partial view of the ways of Providence, have been led to conclude, that exiſtence with all its appendages, was rather a curſe than a bleſſing. Some, under this impreſſion, when immediate calamity preſſed hard upon them, and no hopes of

brighter proſpects in this world remained, have impiouſly put a period to a life they thought not worth poſſeſſing, and ruſhed unbidden into the preſence of the Almighty, cloſing a career of ſin by the higheſt act of diſobedience they were capable of committing.

Severe indeed we muſt allow are the trials of ſome, and complicated and poignant the miſeries they are called to endure; but more dreadful is that error which leads men to ſuppoſe, that any degree of misfortune is beyond remedy. But whatever gloomy and unjuſt apprehenſions of their ſituation ſome, in a deſpairing mood, have indulged, there have been others who have erred in the oppoſite extreme, who have aſſerted that no evils at all exiſt, that the whole is in apprehenſion, and that the grand efforts of virtue were to diſſipate our groundleſs fears, and eradicate the idea of ſenſation from the human mind.

Thus while the laſt, who, with the ancients, went by the name of Stoics, endeavoured

voured to render themſelves independent of God; the firſt withdrew their confidence in his providence, and looked upon themſelves as out of his protection; but equally diſtant from truth if not equally fatal in their effects are theſe errors.

To deny that evil is prevalent in this mortal ſtate, is to oppoſe the oracles of God, contradict the teſtimony of our feelings, and ſet at nought the opinions and experience of all ages; while on the other hand, to ſuppoſe that the evils of life are without remedy, that they are ſent merely to afflict mankind, and will produce no good end, is to impeach the wiſdom and goodneſs of that God who has created all things for the moſt wiſe and benevolent purpoſes. Very different from either of theſe were the ſentiments of the wiſe man, when by the ſpirit of wiſdom with which he was endowed, he penned the ſacred text, that "there ſhall no evil happen to the juſt, but the wicked ſhall be filled with miſchief."

Here he does not, in ſpite of inconteſtible evidence, declare that evil does not exiſt, but acknowledges its reality, and declares where its weight ſhall be felt; the wicked alone are the objects of God's wrath, for not only in the world to come ſhall their iniquity be puniſhed, but even here the evils of life ſhall beſet them, and, not being through faith and grace ſanctified to a godly uſe, ſhall fill their hearts with miſchief; but to the juſt, to thoſe who act in conformity to the divine will, evil ſhall be but an impotent enemy; in this world they ſhall be ſtrengthened to repel its attacks, and in the next be removed from its ſight and influence for ever.

To illuſtrate this comfortable truth, and to aſcertain to whom this valuable privilege belongs, it is neceſſary firſt to enquire into the character and conduct of thoſe whom Solomon calls *juſt*, and then into the nature and influence of what he calls *evil*, from whence the poſition laid down in the text will be clearly eſtabliſhed.

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The meaning of the term *juſt*, when taken comparatively, and applied to tranſactions which take place between man and man, is confined to integrity and fair dealing, and as ſuch is deſcriptive of only part of a virtuous character; for though this juſtice be a virtue, and that of no ſmall utility, it is but one, and may exiſt in a heart otherwiſe eminently corrupt and vicious; but the term *juſt*, when uſed abſolutely, and applied by the ſacred writers as deſcriptive of a general character, is taken in a different and more exalted acceptation; being the chief, it ſtands as the repreſentative of all the reſt, and comprehends every requiſite neceſſary to conſtitute a real Chriſtian.

In this ſenſe Job was a juſt man; becauſe truſting in God, and embracing the truth, he was enabled to act with propriety in every ſituation, and firmly adhered to the ſame principles, notwithſtanding the great change he experienced in external circumſtances: and in this ſenſe Joſeph the huſband of Mary, is called by the ſame appellation, at the time that he was deviſing

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an act of mercy—According to appearances, and upon the principles of juſtice eſtabliſhed in that country, it would have been deemed right to have put away his wife; but he, fearing God, and conſequently acquainted with his own depravity, was unwilling, while he ſtood in need of forgiveneſs himſelf, to be the inſtrument of puniſhment to another; nor could he expect to enjoy happineſs if he became the author of miſery; and it was this tenderneſs of conſcience and benevolence of diſpoſition, which obtained him the epithet of *juſt*: the apoſtle alſo has an eye to the ſame deſcription of perſons, when he ſays, "the juſt ſhall live by faith." Thus, according to the uſage of ſcripture, we are to underſtand by this expreſſion, truly humble, benevolent, and religious characters, whoſe intentions are upright, devotion ſincere, and charity extenſive: indeed, no other can be entitled to the appellation of juſt, when that term is taken in the full import to which it may be extended, when it includes not only our dealing with men, but our conduct towards God, and preſervation

vation of ourſelves. It is neceſſary to have the mind enlightened, the will rectified, and the conduct reduced to a conſiſtency with the divine word and the order of nature, before any one can with propriety be termed juſt, or be a recipient of thoſe bleſſings annexed to the exalted character; therefore the juſt man here meant, is he who has proper apprehenſions of himſelf, of his dependence upon the Almighty, and his connexion with mankind; and who acts in conformity to that knowledge.

Such an one, when (as David expreſſes it) a right ſpirit is renewed within him, will know and feel his own depravity by nature, and his iniquity by practice; will ſee the propriety of being humble before God, and accept of that ſalvation offered through a Redeemer, which he is convinced he could not have wrought out for himſelf.

When he reflects on the omniſcience and providence of God, he will look upon himſelf as continually in his ſight, and behold all

all circumſtances as regulated by his hand —When he conſiders the great importance of eternal things, in compariſon of things temporal, he will feel an attachment to the former adequate to their weight and ſuperiority; and, inſtead of being wholly engroſſed by preſent views and advantages, will allow them no more attention than is conſiſtent with their intrinſic value. If we keep in our mind ſuch a character, whoſe principles of action are founded on truth, deduced from revelation, and corroborated by conſcience, we ſhall have an accurate idea of the juſt man, who, by the conſtitution of things, and the declarations of the Almighty, will be exempt from thoſe evils which torment the reſt of mankind, whom Solomon includes in the term wicked.

We come next to enquire what we are to underſtand by the term evil. The grand aim of mankind is to obtain happineſs and avoid miſery; and their different apprehenſions of what conſtitutes theſe, give riſe to the endleſs variety of purſuits in which they are perpetually engaged.

As

As all men by nature have the ſame wants; as God has afforded one uniform ſyſtem of truth and wiſdom to remove their defects; appointed one channel to communicate his goodneſs, and required the ſame conditions of all to fit them for its reception; it is evident that thoſe who are ſeeking that happineſs which is conſiſtent with our nature, promiſed by the Almighty and attainable by man, muſt alſo be uniform in eſſential opinions and ſimilar in general conduct; the ſame views muſt excite their hopes, and the ſame terrors alarm their fears.

But thoſe who, ignorant of themſelves, neglecting the information of ſcripture, and miſtaking the deſigns of the Almighty, have falſe conceptions of happineſs, and are ſeeking it in oppoſition to the declarations of God, deviate into a thouſand inconſiſtencies; contradict the notions, and thwart the deſigns of each other; and tho' they may often be convinced by experience they are wrong, they may change their plan and yet be equally falſe; and as the ideas

ideas of mankind greatly vary reſpecting happineſs, ſo muſt their opinions of good and evil be widely different; for good is univerſally underſtood to be any thing which conſtitutes or procures happineſs, and evil is any thing which impedes or deſtroys it.

Conſequently with thoſe who have correct conceptions of true felicity, good and evil will alſo be fixed and determinate ideas; but with thoſe who are purſuing the phantoms of imagination, the deluſions of the world, or the inſtigations of irregular and ungoverned paſſions, good and evil will be various and often imaginary; they will be found avoiding that at one time which they ſought at another; to them evil under ſome ſhape muſt perpetually happen; as their hopes of happineſs are irrational, their diſappointment muſt be certain. The votary of pleaſure, caught by the falſe appearance of ſome ſhining object, purſues it with an eagerneſs that allows him not leiſure to obſerve the many obſtacles that lie in the way, which, as he meets them, operate as evils in precluding his wiſhes, and irritate

his temper in proportion as they were unexpected; but ſhould activity and perſeverance remove impediments as they ariſe; ſhould confirmed reſolutions and concurring circumſtances in the end accompliſh his purpoſe; alas! the poſſeſſion diſcovers what was concealed in the hurry of purſuit; he finds *that* empty and unſatisfying which he fondly hoped would have removed his cares and fixed his felicity; what he ſought with anxiety, and embraced with rapture, is ſoon deſpiſed as nugatory, or lamented as unſubſtantial:—they whom youth, fortune, and inclination lead to the circles of faſhion, to whom variety unfolds her choiceſt ſtores, inſtead of being delighted or ſatisfied with their acquiſitions, are conſtantly diſguſted with their inſipidity, or diſconſolate by their flight; the gratifications of pleaſure either by their dulneſs pall upon their ſenſes, or by their rapidity elude their graſp. The worſt paſſions and the bittereſt diſappointments will ever invade the thoughtleſs and diſſipated; the perfidy of falſe friends, and the rancour of inveterate enemies, are inſeperable

perable from the pride and ſelfiſhneſs which unconverted hearts will ever indulge.

The attacks of ſickneſs, and the decline of age, are evils for which they have no remedy, and which they cannot eſcape;—a ſuſpenſion of health totally deranges their plan; the proſpect of death effectually deſtroys it; the advantages with which they are ſurrounded, will neither ſupport their ſpirits or remove their fears; on ſo ſlight a tenure do they hold their beſt enjoyments.

Nor are the prudent and the careful (if deſtitute of religion) more ſecure in their ſituation, or more happy in their attempts; their diſappointments may be of a different nature but will be equally certain; happineſs is as far out of their reach, and evil as near to their heart; they are either ſpending their ſtrength and exhauſting their ſpirits in fruitleſs ſtruggles after the acquiſition of property, or by woeful experience lamenting its vanity and inſignificance; the ſucceſsful are ſoon convinced of the exiſtence of a thouſand evils in life which riches

cannot

cannot remove, and of a thouſand cares they conſtantly inſpire. In ſhort, the whole world, whatever their ſtate or ſituation, whether rich or poor, (except the juſt, whoſe hearts are reformed by religion, and whoſe principles are founded on truth) are reſtleſs and diſſatisfied, the conſtant objects of deluſion or complaint.

But to the juſt, to thoſe who by faith are reconciled to God, who through patience obey the truth, no evil ſhall happen; they are too well acquainted with the periſhing nature and ſhort duration of terreſtrial enjoyment to place their whole dependence upon any thing below; better proſpects and more ſubſtantial joys inſpire their hopes; proſpects which brighten as they proceed, and joys which will not delude or diſappoint their expectations. Therefore if in this life they were to meet with one continued ſeries of misfortunes, if they were wholly precluded from the common comforts of ſociety; if pain, poverty, and reproach conſtantly encompaſſed their path, they would not even then be miſerable;

for as the bleſſings of life did not compoſe their firſt wiſhes, they cannot be their greateſt loſs; as their happineſs was not placed in theſe, their hope is not affected by their removal; and however ſevere their preſent feelings of diſtreſs, they are not inſupportable; for, beholding this world in connexion with the next, as they approach the ſuperior they are prepared to reſign the inferior; their hope is ſupported to the end, for they ſtedfaſtly believe that the deſigns of the Almighty are founded in goodneſs, conducted with wiſdom, and will be productive of laſting felicity.

It is an article of their creed, that afflictive diſpenſations are neceſſary parts of his extenſive ſcheme of mercy and happineſs—and will operate (notwithſtanding their preſent unfavourable appearance,) for the ultimate good of thoſe whom they are appointed to exerciſe: that the ſeverity of trials here will purify their hearts, and prepare them for the enjoyment of full and eternal felicity hereafter.

But though it be true that the greateſt calamities and moſt diſtreſſing ſituation, cannot with reſpect to the juſt be termed evils, as they do not much impede, and cannot eventually deſtroy their happineſs—yet it does not neceſſarily follow, that even in this life they muſt experience all its afflictions, and be excluded from all its comforts; on the contrary, the natural tendency of religion and virtue, defends them againſt the attacks of many evils to which the wicked are ever expoſed; and thoſe which are inſeparable from humanity, have their malignant nature changed by the operations of faith and patience; and are either rendered harmleſs and inoffenſive, or converted into bleſſings which confirm their hopes, and facilitate their happineſs. It is true, the ſincere Chriſtian cannot plead an exemption from poverty and pain; nor will he expect to be ſecure againſt the loſs of friends, or the injuries of the wicked; in this reſpect one event happeneth to the juſt and the unjuſt.

But the ſimplicity of his conduct will protect him from envy; the moderation of his worldly deſires will deliver him from the anxious ſtruggles of competition; the peacefulneſs of his diſpoſition, will repel the turbulence of anger; and his humility eſcape the mortification of pride:—theſe are evils which conſtantly torture the wicked, but which are incompatible with the principles and feelings of one converted by grace from darkneſs to light, from ſin and Satan to the living God. When pain or poverty aſſail him, he muſt feel as a man, but will ſtill as a Chriſtian riſe ſuperior to their attacks.—In the extremities of corporeal ſufferings, he will, like David, have God to make all his bed in his ſickneſs, and reflect that his encreaſing pain muſt end in death; which to the juſt is a welcome meſſenger, as he uſhers them into the realms of peace:—in the loweſt abyſs of poverty, he will not repine at the rich, or envy their ſituation; for, like Agur, he beholds great poſſeſſions in their true light, as injurious to peace and productive of care; he will not be railing at the

the world for treating him with neglect, nor complaining of the insincerity of their friendship; for these by his profession he was taught to expect; he put not his trust in princes, and knew that vain is the help of man; he rejoices, when forsaken by man, that he has a friend which sticketh closer than a brother. If his affliction be great, his countenance may appear sad, but if his faith be firm, his heart will still be filled with comfort. We are not to judge of a Christian by externals; in the midst of his distress he has a joy that a stranger meddles not with, and in the severest of his trials, answers to the description of St. Paul—"as sorrowing yet always rejoicing"—the only evil he fears is sin; but from the punishment of that he is redeemed by a Saviour; and from its dominion delivered by faith. Temptations as they may lead to sin, he must also behold as an evil, but against this he has not only the promise of the Almighty, that "his strength shall be equal to the trial," but has experience, that in resisting evil it flies from him: thus though the external appearance of

events may be ſimilar with reſpect to the righteous and the wicked, yet their internal operations are widely different: the ſting will be extracted from adverſity by the principles the former profeſſes; for as his corrupt affections muſt be mortified, the Chriſtian will behold the trials of his patience as eſſential to his ſalvation; and will rejoice under every variation of circumſtances, convinced that through the overruling providence of a wiſe and merciful God, all things ſhall work together for the good of thoſe that love him, and wait for his appearing.

SER-

SERMON III.

MATT. vi. 22, 23.

The Light of the Body is the Eye; if therefore thine Eye be ſingle, thy whole Body ſhall be full of Light; but if thine Eye be evil, thy whole Body ſhall be full of Darkneſs.

WE have here, by an eaſy and natural figure, very beautifully repreſented, that noble ſimplicity of conduct, that uniform courſe of action, that ſtraight line to happineſs which Chriſtianity effectually teaches.

In all our natural operations, the eye is the chief pilot; and though for the ſake of ſymetry, ſtrength, or to provide againſt accidents, we are furniſhed by nature with

two, we have yet but one ſight; the hands or the feet may be employed in different directions, but no habit or dexterity can diſcipline the eyes to act independent of each other; the very attempt produces diſtortion; and darkneſs or confuſion is the immediate conſequence. In a general view, the eye commands an immenſe range of proſpect, and indiſtinctly diſcovers an infinite variety of objects; yet, the moment we mean to collect accurate information, or apply our ſight to ſome real uſe, it is confined to a ſingle point; a ſmall ſpot occupies the whole organ, and even to ſo determinate a degree, that an obſerver may eaſily diſcover the preciſe part upon which another has fixed his particular attention. And ſuch is the great utility of this ſimple and direct viſion, that it facilitates the operation of all our other powers, and enables us to exert them with energy and effect.

But if this channel of information, this light of the body be cloſed, how great is the darkneſs! The operation of every other

other member is impeded; and it either ſinks us into a ſtate of inactivity, or ſubjects us to the danger of continual miſtake. The conſtant exerciſes of caution, the extraordinary improvement of other faculties, may operate as a ſubſtitute to alleviate the evil; but ſo excellent and eſſential is the gift of ſight, that nothing in any tolerable degree can ſupply its defect.

What the eye is to the body, a clear, uniform principle of action is to the ſoul; and to implant ſuch a principle in the mind of man, is the grand aim of religion.

The Chriſtian religion is not compoſed of doctrines hard to comprehend in themſelves, or difficult to reconcile with each other; it is not made up of a multiplicity of rules, abſtruſe in their nature, or inapplicable to practice; but conſiſts in a ſimple principle diſtinctly branched out into a number of plain, uſeful, and practical particulars: it requires no exalted genius to underſtand, but only an honeſt heart to embrace.

embrace. A great depth of judgment to penetrate its myſteries is not neceſſary, but an unbiaſſed attention to the truths it imparts is eſſential: the taſk it impoſes is neither irkſome or painful; but, ſuch as it is, it muſt be undertaken with ſincerity, and purſued with conſtancy.

To determine whether a man be a real Chriſtian, requires no minute inveſtigation of the articles of his creed; no nice enquiries into the particulars of his practice; the enquiry can only be anſwered to a certainty, by knowing the principle that governs his actions; or, in ſcripture language, knowing the maſter whom he obeys; for our Lord has moſt unequivocally informed us, that we cannot ſerve two.

Whether we are religious or not, there will ever be in our hearts ſome ruling principle, ſome prevalent motive. The world at different times, as their intereſt or inclinations vary, are influenced by different and even contrary motives, which introduce confuſion into their ſyſtem, render

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their character inconſiſtent, and their conduct contemptible; for ſometimes there is ſuch a ſtruggle between two propenſities, whoſe forces approach nearly to an equality, as not only divides their attention, but overwhelms them in uncertainty:—while with the ſimple and ſincere Chriſtian the ſame principle conſtantly prevails, the ſame deſigns are uniformly purſued; his eternal ſalvation is the end he has conſtantly in view, and the will of God is the rule he adopts to attain it: a revealed goſpel inſpires his hopes of a joyful eternity; and a love of his neighbour regulates his preſent commerce with the world.

In the variety of circumſtances which a changeable ſtate conſtantly affords, he always for his direction liſtens to the dictates of a conſcience, which he labors to preſerve, void of offence towards God and towards man.

But to ſhew the ſuperiority of the leading motive of a Chriſtian, in promoting his peace, and fixing his happineſs; and the

the deficiency of thoſe which govern the world, I ſhall enter a little more minutely into the conduct and character of each.

Whenever mankind have neglected the ſimple inſtructions of religion, they have wandered into a thouſand devious and inconſiſtent modes of acting, and conſequently have in general been confuſed in their proſpects, irregular in their progreſs, and diſappointed in their end.

Suppoſe the accumulation of wealth to be the main object, and that the purſuer imagines felicity and riches to be ſynonimous terms; that every pleaſure is to be obtained, and every want driven away by him who enjoys opulence: his ſpiritual ſight is then defective; the eye of his mind is evil, and his whole body, or to drop the metaphor, his whole ſyſtem of conduct is full of darkneſs: for he has an object before him, the nature of which he groſsly miſtakes; he ſees, that wealth will miniſter to the gratification of the ſenſes, and falſely concludes, that it will ſatisfy all

all his deſires: as every error muſt in the end be expoſed, if even therefore he ſucceeds for a time, he is only accumulating the miſery of a future diſcovery, which will be felt with greater horror in proportion as it is deferred; — but if his attempts fail, he is then racked with immediate diſappointment.

To the acquiſition of riches there is no path that is plain and practicable; there are many whoſe main deſign is to promote their worldly intereſt, but there are none who know to a certainty what ſteps will moſt advance it. Mankind are often deceived in preſſing an apparent advantage too far, or miſtaken in their precautions to avoid injury; and therefore the miſer, after all his toil and anxiety, will be in continual danger of marring his fortune, by ſome of what he thinks his beſt ſchemes; but ſhould his expectations be anſwered, as far as temporal ſucceſs can extend, he will nevertheleſs be perpetually harraſſed with conſtant fatigue, and ſtung with occaſional diſappointment; his progreſs will be frequently

quently retarded, but his ultimate end, the attaining of happineſs, muſt at laſt be defeated. For though the ardent deſire of riches may in the purſuit have ſtifled the feelings of nature; in the leiſure which acquiſition allows, they will revive, and convince him, that there are deſires which the greateſt poſſeſſions cannot ſatisfy.

There is a ſocial principle in the human breaſt, which the beſt of men are ſolicitous to encourage, and which the worſt cannot totally ſhake off, that inclines them to deſire and enjoy the good will and eſteem of their fellow mortals; but, inſtead of being beloved and reſpected, he who uniformly purſues his individual intereſt, will be generally deſpiſed: the man therefore whoſe grand object is wealth, when he feels the contempt and ſcorn of mankind, will ſometimes think that he is purchaſing his riches too dear; he will even wiſh for the character of having a good heart and generous diſpoſition, but that again will coſt him too much: no mind can be long totally inſenſible to preſent enjoyment, and even the avaricious

avaricious will occaſionally be induced to diſburſe more liberally than uſual on this account, in proportion to the ſtrength of preſent inclinations; this will inevitably introduce diſtraction into his ſchemes, and inconſiſtency into his conduct: at one time he will mortify his deſires to encreaſe his ſtore, and at another by indulging his feelings, break in upon his plan: he will frequently view the pleaſures of the world at a diſtance, as friends he ſhould like to entertain; but at their approach, he will conſider them as ſo many enemies that would purloin his wealth; nor will he always be able to repel his deſires, notwithſtanding he trembles at the expence of ſatisfying them, and therefore on one ſide or the other, he is conſtantly driven to a diſagreeable alternative, either by ſaving to ſacrifice his immediate happineſs, or elſe by expenditure to condemn his paſt conduct: and however the world may in general engroſs his thoughts, there are times when religious reflections will ariſe, when the warning voice of God muſt be heard. The ſtroke of death that removes our friends,

and

and the attacks of ſickneſs that aſſault our frame, will, when they occur involuntarily fix our thoughts on eternity;—the inſtances of mortality are too frequent, and the advances of age too plain, to allow a perpetual inattention to our own diſſolution: religion even to the miſer, if not deſirable, will often appear neceſſary; he will be led by fear to draw near to the altar, but be prevented by avarice from offering up his heart; he will wiſh to enjoy the privileges of Chriſtianity, while he inwardly ſhudders at the precepts it enjoins. To reſign all, were it required, for Chriſt's ſake, is a requiſition generally too hard for one who has great poſſeſſions. To give with a liberal hand, or lend with an unſuſpecting heart, is by the religious eſteemed an indiſpenſible duty, and felt as a practice that, even in the performance, confers happineſs; but with the covetous, it is beheld as the high road to ruin; he hears of treaſures laid up in heaven, but his affections are rivetted to thoſe on earth. And can ſuch an one, who trembles at his own plan, and yet purſues it,—who feels the

inſufficiency of his preſent poſſeſſions with reſpect to happineſs, and yet cannot reſign them for better; can ſuch an one be ſaid to ſee clearly, or to diſcern his own true and enlarged intereſt? ſurely his eye is evil, and conſequently his whole body full of darkneſs! The ambitious and the ſenſual may deſpiſe the miſer, but neither are they, though they take a different path, more ſteady in their progreſs, or more ſucceſsful in their endeavours; their views of happineſs are generally falſe, and their conduct, when examined by reaſon, fully as inconſiſtent; and many others, whoſe life is not marked with ſuch a flagrant deviation from propriety, as to rank them with the profligate and profane, are yet not exempt from this folly of ignorance or inconſiſtency of conduct. Thoſe who are labouring, while they pretend to worſhip God, to ſet up ſome idol in the heart, and vainly imagine that it is not quite impoſſible to ſerve two maſters, are under the influence of an evil eye. The unreſerved ſurrender of the heart to the diſpoſal of the Almighty, is a ſacrifice they are not wil-

ling to offer, and therefore endeavour to perſuade themſelves that it is unneceſſary: as the world and religion are perpetually calling them contrary ways, they halt between two opinions; ſometimes approaching nearer to the one, and ſometimes to the other, as conſcience or evil paſſions gain the aſcendant.

At one period, when their fears are alarmed, they will behold religion as the moſt important concern, to which every thing earthly ſhould ſubmit; and at other times, when any ſubmiſſion is actually required, they will look upon its requiſitions as hardſhips, and endeavour by ſome falſe gloſs to accommodate them to their worldly convenience; the deſires they are inclined to indulge, they hope religion does not forbid; and they will not make too cloſe an enquiry, leſt their favourite inclinations ſhould be condemned. But ſurely that mind cannot be ſaid to have a clear and diſtinct view of things, whoſe determinations are ſo unſteady, and whoſe views are ſo various.—The number among mankind who

who deceive themſelves are not a few; multitudes are led to believe, that they have embraced religion, when they have not received its firſt principles, and vainly think that they are obeying God, when in their ordinary occupation of life they liſten not to his voice.

The men in the Goſpel, who framed excuſes for not attending the marriage ſupper, might ſuppoſe themſelves capable of no more than deferring the preſent invitation, when in the eye of reaſon they amounted to a refuſal; for if on account of ſlight inconveniences we poſtpone the conſideration of our true intereſt, a continued ſucceſſion of ſuch trifles will occupy the mind, and prevent it being at leiſure to receive what, nevertheleſs at times, it wiſhes to enjoy. Nor is there any ground to ſuppoſe, that at a future period, we ſhall be more ready to reſign worldly deſires than at the preſent: when habits are longer eſtabliſhed, they are more difficult to remove, and there is juſt cauſe to fear, that though upon a view of the ſhortneſs of

life, or the mortality of our frame, our ſerious reflections may diſturb our repoſe, that they will not be powerful enough to convert the heart.

So much do worldly poſſeſſions darken the mind, that the light of truth itſelf is obſcured, and the proſpect of eternity in a great meaſure hid from our view; a ſmall and contemptible object, if brought too near, will effectually exclude a diſtant one, though of the greateſt magnitude, and ſhining with immortal glory.

Nor are flagrant crimes the only enemies that annoy our peace and becloud our underſtanding. The real bleſſings of life, if they engroſs our beſt affections, become a ſnare; and even one particular duty, if it engage our whole attention, to the excluſion of the reſt; as far as it deviates into exceſs is culpable. When our Lord called a man in the Goſpel to follow him—his anſwer of, "Let me firſt go and bury my father," was in itſelf more than a juſt, it was a pious requeſt; but it became a crime,

crime, when it was made a firſt concern; the great care of her houſhold, which Martha exerciſed, was in reality a commendation; but there was ſtill a better part to perform, a one thing needful to be ſought, in which ſhe equalled not the zeal and piety of her ſiſter Mary. Our earthly duties ought to be performed, and our earthly poſſeſſions may be enjoyed, but neither ſhould render us deaf to the call of heaven. It is the preferring the leſs to the greater, that conſtitutes the blindneſs of the world; and intercepting an eternal proſpect, by ſome earthly ſcreen that involves them in mental darkneſs.

And from this worſt of evils the ſincere Chriſtian is alone delivered. His plan is conſiſtent and his proſpect is clear; he has one uniform grand deſign, with which he will not ſuffer inferior concerns to interfere: without being inattentive to temporal duties, or detaching himſelf wholly from the enjoyments of the world, he keeps them in due ſubordination to his higher and more laſting views.

The good things of this life he can enjoy with pleaſure, but if occaſion require, he can part with them in peace; they were agreeable appendages to his felicity, but did not conſtitute his chief happineſs; their preſence ſoothed him in the journey of life, but he did not ſuffer them to impede his progreſs toward heaven: however the preſent ſcene may change, however occaſional ſucceſs and diſappointment may variegate his path, they can only affect his external feelings; his heart remains untouched; the main object that inſpired his hope is not removed, nor the light that directed his purſuit withdrawn; his progreſs may be checked, but the means of recovery is at hand. Through the imperfection of humanity, he may yield to ſlight deviation; but he never loſes ſight of the main road; a cloud of misfortunes may ſometimes throw a temporary gloom on his ſpirits, and threaten to involve him in thick darkneſs; but he has a never-failing ſource within, a purified conſcience, which, like a riſing ſun, will ſoon diſpel exery miſt, and brighten his future proſpect. In fine, the goal to which

which he is haſtening is fixed and eternal; the joys he ſeeks are permanent and ſatisfying, and the guide he has choſen is infallible.

If the fig-tree ſhould ceaſe to bloſſom, and the herd fail from the ſtall; if nature herſelf ſhould ſicken, and yield up her delights to deſtruction;—he has yet a treaſure to which he can reſort; a ſecurity in which he truſts; for God, who is the ſame yeſterday, to day, and for ever, is the ſtrength of his heart and his everlaſting portion:—he is fixed upon a rock, and the building he has erected thereon muſt ſtand: though the waves of affliction beat againſt it, and the fierceſt temptations exhauſt their fury, it will remain unſhaken.

If we would avoid the curſe pronounced upon Reuben, of being unſtable in all our ways; if we have proper apprehenſions of the horrid doubts that await an unſettled mind, and an irreſolute conduct, we muſt no longer halt between two opinions; but labor to fix our principles to a determinate

point; and ſimplify our life by an uniform rule. To this end we muſt firſt diſcover what is the higheſt excellence, and then examine the neareſt path to attain it; if any thing ſhort of that is our firſt object, it muſt be changed; and the ſooner we correct our courſe, the leſs are we expoſed to danger: Would we know whether we are in the right road? The examination is eaſy—God is and muſt be confeſſed the ſupreme good; the ſole fountain of our exiſtence; the only ſource of our bleſſings: do we eſteem him ſuch, by the warmth of our affections, and the purity of our obedience?

Is David's holy ſentiment, "Whom have I in heaven but thee, and there is none upon earth I deſire in compariſon of thee," not only the expreſſion of our mouths, but the language of our lives? Chriſt we acknowledge to be the expreſs image of his perſon, and the full revelation of his glory; do we therefore contemplate his infinite perfections in that exhibition, and endeavour to approach him in the only appointed way?

And,

And, to avoid temptations that may cloud our views, and miſlead our ſteps, do we conſult the word he has afforded? purſue the ſimplicity of conduct he recommends? and pray for the ſpirit he has promiſed? if we purſue our eternal intereſts with this ſingle eye, we ſhall eſteem the pureſt and higheſt enjoyments of this world, only as agreeable refreſhments of which we may innocently partake, but which we ſoon muſt and are ever ready to reſign.—We ſhall be anxious to keep our ſteadieſt views and beſt wiſhes upon that inheritance, which beſides its unſpeakable worth, is durable as the immortal ſoul. To what our ſpiritual faculties may hereafter be capable of being exalted we know not; of the nature and glory of heavenly enjoyments we cannot now faintly conceive; but it is an animating and ineſtimable addition to their value, that they will laſt for ever; it is highly probable that they may continually encreaſe, but it is certain that they will never fade away.

SERMON IV.

LUKE xiv. 11.

Whoſoever exalteth himſelf, *ſhall be abaſed; and he that humbleth himſelf, ſhall be exalted.*

OUR Lord, in the courſe of his divine teaching, has left us the moſt perfect example of the beſt methods of communicating knowledge to the human mind; for in all his inſtructions he united a winning gentleneſs of manner, with ſtrong and penetrating obſervation; and conveyed in the mode of mild expoſtulations, the ſtrength and energy of remonſtrance. To thoſe who were delighted with truth, and ſeeking ſalvation, his doctrine was at once pleaſing and prevalent; and even thoſe, whom long habits of vice, or deep-rooted religious

religious prejudices prevented from receiving his goſpel, were yet completely confuted by the ſtrength and juſtneſs of his reaſoning.

In the preſent inſtance, he had ſeen with regret the pride and oſtentation of the ſuperſtitious phariſees, who on account of their religious auſterities, and regularity of external deportment, exacted and obtained a ſuperior reverence from the common people. For the vulgar, whoſe avocations of life, and difference of education, would not admit of ſo ſcrupulous a compliance with ceremonies, judging by appearances, really gave the Phariſees credit for all the ſanctity and religion to which they proudly laid claim.

But our Lord, who not only was a proper judge of their manners, but accurately knew their hearts, in order pointedly to reprove them, and afford a neceſſary leſſon to the multitude, gave the following plain and practical advice: "When thou art bidden of any man to a wedding, ſit not

down in the higheſt room, leſt a more honourable man than thou be bidden of him; and he that bade thee and him come, and ſay to thee, give this man place; and thou begin with ſhame to take the loweſt room. But whenever thou art bidden, go and ſit down in the loweſt room, that when he that bade thee cometh, he may ſay unto thee, friend, go up higher: then ſhalt thou have worſhip in the preſence of them that ſit at meat with thee. For whoſoever exalteth himſelf ſhall be abaſed, and he that humbleth himſelf ſhall be exalted."

Nothing could better illuſtrate to them the principle our Lord meant to convey, than an alluſion to a marriage feaſt, which in general among the Jews was the moſt ſplendid and public of all their entertainments; and at which, among the great, they took much care to marſhal their viſitants, as their wealth, rank, or reputation entitled them to pre-eminence. The feelings of their pride muſt be rouſed at the repreſentations of the maſter of a feaſt leading, amidſt the acclamations of the beholders,

holders, an honorable gueſt to a more diſtinguiſhed ſeat; and they muſt be equally touched with a quick ſenſe of the ſhame annexed to the diſgrace of being publicly removed with contempt to an inferior ſituation. But though the text ſtrongly applied to Jewiſh manners, and is peculiarly pointed at a predominant failing among them; it is, nevertheleſs, of ſuch general tendency, that it is applicable to every age, ſex, or ſtation in life: it is levelled at a vice that is dangerous and prevailing, and tends to eſtabliſh a Chriſtian grace that is eſſential and illuſtrious.

Of all the temptations that aſſault the human heart, there is not one that attacks it ſooner, attends it more conſtantly, or clings cloſer to the laſt ſtage of exiſtence, than pride: a ſuperficial obſerver indeed may ſuppoſe that it is confined to the wealthy and the gay; that ſplendor of dreſs, and diſplay of ornament are its chief indications; but thoſe who are better acquainted with their own hearts, and have a more extenſive knowledge of the world, know

know that it is not limited to ſuch confined boundaries; they behold it exerting its baleful influence, though under different appearances, among the indigent, as well as the wealthy; the old as well as the young. For ſo various are its operations upon different minds, and under different circumſtances, that oſtentatious parade, and affected plainneſs, are frequently produced by the ſame principle. One man, with outward habiliments that border upon beggary, will proudly boaſt of the ſums he is worth; and while he inveighs againſt the pride and vanity of expending money upon ſuperfluities, will aſſume a conſequence upon the mere poſſeſſing of it: another, amidſt all the inconveniences of real poverty, will be proud of making a ſhining appearance, and bear the preſſure of ſecret diſtreſs ſooner than hazard a momentary diſgrace, by giving up a little of his unneceſſary, expenſive ſplendor. The ſame vice that leads the young to deſire diſtinguiſhed attention for perſonal beauty, induces the old to claim too great reſpect for their years and experience. Even the

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learned pedant, while he looks down with contempt upon the petty ſtruggles of the ignorant for ſuperiority, is often ſacrificing to the ſame idol, and ſwells with ſelf ſufficiency at the conſciouſneſs of having a little more knowledge than the multitude. Thus it is natural to the heart of man, partially to ſurvey his perſon, abilities, attainments, or circumſtances, in order to find ſome foundation whereon to found a title to diſtinction, and challenge the praiſe of his fellow mortals. And if all perſonal claims be refuſed, and nothing internal appear to ſupport his pretenſions, he will even take to himſelf conſequence from ſomething purely external; the connexions of his family, the talents of his children, the fertility of his native country, become objects of his pride, and obſtacles to humility.

But as all vice in general is the abuſe of ſome virtue, ſo pride is founded upon a propenſity, excellent in itſelf, but, in its operations, ill directed. The love of praiſe is a ſtrong, natural, and innocent feeling of the human

human breaſt; under the regulation of reaſon, it ſtimulates our beſt faculties to their nobleſt uſes, dignifies our nature, and leads to excellence; but, under the influence of a corrupt heart, and depraved will, it inſpires a ſinful, vain, and ridiculous pride, that catches at momentary applauſe; is fond of petty diſtinctions, and ſacrifices the nobleſt powers of the mind in the purſuit of a mere ſhadow.

The love of praiſe and exaltation is, therefore, not to be totally ſuppreſſed, but properly exerted; and the text plainly indicates this deſire of commendation, together with ſuitable directions for its reſtriction and due management. For, I. We may obſerve that exaltation and praiſe is eſteemed a real good by our Lord, as he declares it to be a bleſſing the worthy ſhall finally enjoy. II. That the immediate and ſelf aſſumption of it will be followed with diſappointment: and, III. That the only way to obtain and preſerve it, is by practiſing humility.

The

The intellectual powers and faculties of mankind, ſeem peculiarly formed for continued improvement, and evidently ſhew, that our beneficent Creator intended us for a more exalted ſtate than that we at preſent occupy; and the true dignity of our nature conſiſts, not in what we are at preſent, but in what by internal exertion and divine communication we are capable of becoming. A future ſtate, from the concluſions of reaſon, and the numerous lights thrown upon it in ſcripture, is ſuppoſed to be a ſtate of perpetual advancement; that various ranks in a ſublime order will take place among the bleſſed. This opinion is juſtified by St. Paul, who aſſerts, that "as one ſtar differs from another ſtar in glory, ſo it ſhall be in the reſurrection." From the united information of the inſpired writers we collect, that ſeven diſtinct gradations now exiſt in the heavenly regions; which, when two or more of them are mentioned together, are always claſſed in the following order; Thrones, Principalities, Powers, Seraphim, Cherubim, Archangels and Angels. And when the near approach of

our firſt parent (by the purity of his mental powers) to the celeſtial inhabitants is mentioned in ſcripture, it is obſervable, that the loweſt order of celeſtial ſpirits is uſed; for it is ſaid, man was made a little lower than the angels; and when the Almighty, in his wonderful miniſtration of the moral government of the world has for ſpecial purpoſes opened a communication between earth and heaven, angels, as the order neareſt to ourſelves, have always been employed in the ſacred meſſage. But whenever future glory is exhibited to our view under earthly figures, the higheſt diſtinctions among men are uſed to enlarge our conceptions, and elevate our minds; thrones of power, crowns of glory, and offices of dignity, are conſtantly ſelected as the beſt repreſentations of the exaltation of that ſtate, and the excellence of thoſe rewards which the faithful ſhall hereafter enjoy, and which now, even by the aſſiſtance of the brighteſt images, we can but imperfectly comprehend. Inveloped as we are in the deep ſhade of mortality, we cannot conceive any thing more glorious, than

kings

kings when free from envy, and exalted to reign for ever; than crowns when void of contention, and that fade not away, or dignities when delivered from the toil of office, and conferred by eternal wiſdom.

An earthly monarch, whoſe life is as brittle as our own, is but the meteor of a moment; when we conſider him ſurrounded by a cumbrous load of royalty that forbids repoſe; dazzled with the luſtre of his ſituation, that he cannot diſtinguiſh friends from enemies; and through ignorance often puniſhing the innocent and cheriſhing the unworthy; he appears more an object of pity than veneration—but ſuppoſing him delivered from his infirmities, and confirmed on his throne, his ſituation is materially altered; all that moved our compaſſion is then gone, and all that excited our admiration remains; cares and diſtraction have then vaniſhed, and comfort and tranquillity ſucceeded in their room; an extenſive power then enables him to do good to a certainty, as an enlightened underſtanding prevents him from injury and

miſtake. But, without expatiating upon the ſplendor of the figures by which heaven is metaphorically repreſented, the very terms, "kings and prieſts unto God," which the apoſtle uſes, would be nugatory and ineffectual, unleſs addreſſed to beings eminently deſirous of exaltation; and prove that our natural propenſity to aſpire is not to be eradicated but refined. When the pureſt and nobleſt objects are ſet before us, ardent emulation is then not only juſt, but commendable; the whole danger lies in fixing our deſires upon falſe and fancied elevation, and exerting them in a way contrary to the will of God; diſcordant to the harmony of creation; and productive of miſery and confuſion.

II. The principle mode of abuſing this uſeful and neceſſary propenſity, is by an immediate and ſelf-aſſumption of conſequence, which in the end will always be diſappointed. "Whoever exalteth himſelf ſhall be abaſed."—It is a common and a juſt obſervation, that in all caſes we are but indifferent judges of our own cauſe; that a par-

a partiality for ſelf leads us to magnify our own rights, and claim more than juſtice will warrant; "every man," ſays Solomon, "ſeemeth right in his own eyes, but when his neighbour cometh he proveth him," and this propenſity of ſelf-love, is never more improperly or perniciouſly exerted, than in aſcertaining our own title to rank and eſtimation. That man muſt have a ſtrong underſtanding united to a good heart, who can paſs an impartial judgment upon himſelf; the wiſe will ever behold it as a dangerous experiment, and the humble will never attempt it. There are two modes of deception in this buſineſs of eſtimating ourſelves; we are apt both to ſuppoſe whatever we happen to excel in, whether it be riches, learning, or rank, to be entitled to more eſtimation than it generally deſerves, and that our excellence therein is greater than it really is; for beſides the propenſity of the individual to over-rate his own qualifications, we find a ſtrong partiality to claim a high diſtinction for the whole claſs to which he happens to belong.

Among the noble, a long illuſtrious line of anceſtors is accounted the beſt title to eminence; and wealth, learning, or any other excellence, is beheld with a degree of contempt; or as a trifling difference that exiſts in inferior ranks, but which ought to give place to birth and family: the learned alſo plume themſelves upon the beſt right to general eſtimation, and conſider wealth or title as conferring no excellence worthy the attention of a wiſe man: nor are the rich at all behind theſe in magnifying their own ſituation; for while they deſpiſe either a gentleman or a ſcholar, if in penury, they behold wealth as the ſovereign good, and its poſſeſſor as enjoying the beſt right to ſuperiority. Thus while all, who have falſe views of greatneſs, are deceiving themſelves, both with reſpect to the real nature of excellence in general, and their own pretenſions in particular, it is evident they muſt be diſappointed; as none are inclined cordially to yield, what all are prone proudly to claim; their ſtruggle for advancement therefore muſt be fruitleſs, their abaſement certain; for even two who cannot

agree

agree in adjuſting their own titles to pre-eminence, will unite in degrading a third, as his fall ſeems to make a readier way for their own promotion. Therefore, a ſelf-aſſumed exaltation, as it is founded in a falſe conception of true dignity, an evident miſtake of the nature of our powers, and a groſs perverſion of an inherent propenſity, muſt in the end defeat its own purpoſes. In this world, inſtead of permanent honor, it will introduce painful competition and occaſional diſgrace. If we give way to pride, our rivals, here, will be perplexing us with conſtant obſtacles to advancement; but, hereafter, the Maſter of the feaſt will not only finally annihilate our claims to pre-eminence, but confound us with everlaſting ſhame.

Would we poſſeſs that real and exalted excellence, to which we are called by the word of God, and which by grace we are enabled to attain; our apprehenſions of it muſt be corrected; and our endeavours exerted in a contrary direction. To riſe in

real and laſting dignity, we muſt firſt ſink in ſelf-eſtimation. For

III. "He that humbleth himſelf ſhall be exalted."

A rational being ought not to expect enjoyment without reflexion; if happineſs be accidental, we are endowed with mental powers to no purpoſe: reaſon is given to man, that our felicity might not be precarious but certain; and in proportion as we exert or neglect that divine faculty, we ſhall eventually be happy or miſerable. If the violent and variable guſts of paſſions impel us forward, we ſhall ſoon be driven againſt ſome unforſeen rock, and all our pleaſing hopes and expectations ſuffer ſhipwreck; but if reaſon take the helm, and ſhape our courſe by the compaſs of inſpired truth, every evil in our paſſage will be timely diſcovered and ſafely avoided; the occaſional deviations of nature corrected, and the haven of felicity finally gained.

If therefore we are conſcious of an aſpiring nature, and feel a deſire of exaltation, we ſhould not follow a blind impulſe that may lead us aſtray, or catch at the firſt trivial diſtinction that offers itſelf; but look round for the true object of rational eſtimation, and coolly examine the method of attaining it. Nothing, in the eye of reaſon, can be valuable that is not laſting; and therefore the vain diſtinctions of this world, and the approbation of periſhing men, will ſoon, upon examination, be found inſufficient to ſatisfy an immortal being; the enquiring mind will proceed, till it diſcovers that the acquittal of conſcience, and the approbation of God, is the only ſolid and laſting exaltation; before which the ſplendor of worldly glory inſtantaneouſly fades, and the higheſt mortal honors ſhrink to nothing.

The deſire of commendation will now be directed to its proper object, but at what a diſtance is that object! when we look up to the Almighty, the holineſs of his nature,

ture, and the infinity of his perfections, demand ſuch a degree of purity to approach his preſence, or claim his approbation, as muſt ſtrike us with ſacred awe. When we look inward upon our own hearts, when conſcience is faithfully conſulted, we are preſented with ſuch a ſcene of impurity and diſobedience, as muſt inſpire us with humility bordering on deſpair. We ſhall be ready with David to cry out, "what is man that thou art mindful of him, or the ſon of man that thou pleaſeſt to viſit him." But this view of the Almighty, and this knowledge of our own ſtate, though it will effectually check the aſſumption, will not extinguiſh the deſire of exaltation: the wiſh for inward and divine approbation will remain, when the pretenſions to it are removed. And now the heart, though apparently at a greater diſtance from excellence, is better prepared for its reception. Delivered from the anxiety of ſtriving for earthly diſtinctions by a conviction of their vanity, it is at leiſure to confine its thoughts to a more exalted enquiry; and will ſoon

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diſcover, that God, of whom as ſinners we can claim nothing, is ever of his own mercy ready to beſtow all things; that he alone has a right to confer diſtinguiſhed bleſſings, and that the aſſumption of man is vain and ſinful.

Humility, as it ſets up no claims, cannot experience the diſgrace of rejection: it leads us to a patient acquieſcence in the diſpenſations of Providence, and to an acknowledgment that, whatever may be the arrangement of divine bleſſings, more is always enjoyed than it merited. Such a diſpoſition, as it is favourable to continual improvement, lays a foundation for true and laſting exaltation.

The humble Chriſtian, conſcious of his own demerit, will aſſume no conſequence, but labor by the rectification of judgment, and extermination of evil, to qualify himſelf for higher ſituations and a ſuperior ſtate; and not immediately anxious to poſſeſs, but conſtantly intent to deſerve, he will

will imperceptibly acquire a real but unconſcious dignity of mind; the pureſt patterns of perfection will be ſelected for imitation; and the nobleſt objects will engage his purſuit; till his ſoul be wrought to a ſimilitude of what he venerates, and without competition, the objects of his deſire meet his wiſhes. Even in temporal things, ſuch a diſpoſition will be favorable to ſucceſs; for true merit will be diſcerned through the veil of modeſty, and drawn reluctantly from the ſhade, often enjoy without the bitterneſs of rivalſhip, diſtinctions that the proud ſtruggle for in vain. But in a ſuperior ſtate it will be recompenſed indeed; then that God, who has made many promiſes to the meek, will fulfil them all. When the moſt ſecret obedience to the divine will ſhall be rewarded openly; when mercy ſhall have made its laſt tender, and juſtice proceed to an impartial and final diſtribution; then humility will be the diſtinguiſhing mark, as it has been the diſtinguiſhing excellence of Chriſt's diſciples; who, while through an

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holy diffidence, they are ready to take the loweſt room, will, with the ineffable ſmile of divine love, be exalted to a higher ſituation; preſented with a crown of glory that fadeth not away, and uſhered into the preſence of that God, before whom is fulneſs of joy, and at whoſe right hand are pleaſures for evermore. *Amen.*

SER-

SERMON V.

II SAM. xii. 7.

And Nathan ſaid to David, thou art the Man.

NONE will deny that the moral obligations of virtue, and the injunctions of religion, if ſtrictly attended to, would be univerſally beneficial. But the evil is, that while mankind highly commend the moſt excellent rules of conduct, and ſeverely condemn the deviations from morality and rectitude, they fail to make the application to their own caſe; and only continue to recommend unto others what they neglect to obey themſelves.

This, notwithſtanding his general piety, was once the caſe of David, who ſpiritly entered

entered into the reaſoning of the prophet; burnt with zeal againſt the glaring inequity deſcribed; and pronounced a heavy ſentence upon the unknown offender. But he did not ſeem to have the moſt diſtant conception, that he himſelf had committed the heinous offence the prophet had juſt repreſented, and was obnoxious to the penalty he had uttered with his own lips. So much are we prone to be ignorant of our own failings, while we are keen and clear ſighted in diſcovering, and ready in acknowledging the propriety and force of general rules of obedience.

The event that gave riſe to this paſſage, was David's flagrant and well known crime of adultery with Bathſheba, and the conſequent murder of Uriah her huſband: which in the preceding chapter is fully related, and concludes with theſe words, "and the thing which David had done diſpleaſed the Lord."

In this tranſaction King David, who was in general a man of a good heart, ſeems by the

the violence of paſſion to have ſtifled for a time the internal feelings of conſcience; and being inveſted with regal power and in high reputation for courage and integrity, he was far above the reach of public laws or private admonition; a ſpecial meſſenger therefore was diſpatched by the Almighty to convince him of his ſin, and repreſent in its true colours the enormity of his tranſgreſſion. The ſolemn meſſage is delivered by way of parable, and in the beginning of this chapter is couched in the following terms: "And the Lord ſent Nathan unto David; and he came unto him, and ſaid unto him; there were *two* men in *one* city; the *one* rich, and the *other* poor. The rich man had exceeding many flocks and herds, but the poor man had nothing ſave one little ewe lamb, which he had bought and nouriſhed up; and it grew up together with him, and with his children; it did eat of his own meat, and drank of his own cup, and lay in his boſom, and was unto him as a daughter. And there came a traveller unto the rich man, and he ſpared to take of his own flock,

flock, and of his own herd, to dreſs for the wayfaring man that was come unto him, but took the *poor* man's lamb, and dreſſed it for the man that was come unto him. And David's anger was greatly kindled againſt the man, and he ſaid to Nathan, as the Lord liveth, the man that hath done this thing, ſhall ſurely die. And he ſhall reſtore the lamb four fold, becauſe he did this thing, and becauſe he had no pity."

" And Nathan ſaid to David, *thou* art the man."

This paſſage forcibly points out the wide difference, between the *embracing* religion, as a *ſyſtem of ſound opinions*, and *adopting* it as a *rule of life*; between its *exiſtence* in the *head*, and its *operation* on the *heart*; between the merely approving it for its *excellence*, and applying it to its *uſe*. Well might Solomon ſay, that " the heart is deceitful above all things, and deſperately wicked:" for the royal Pſalmiſt, who, as a general character, might be termed learned and religious, was yet ignorant of his own

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ſtate. Though clear in diſcerning the principles of moral juſtice, and active in enforcing them on others, he was nevertheleſs inſenſible that he had committed the moſt flagrant violation againſt them; at the recital of the parable his religious feelings were rouſed, but his conſcience remained untouched; his *own* offences, though of ſo heinous a nature as to aſtoniſh mankind, and remain in hiſtory as a lamentable evidence how low even good men may fall, ſeem to be obliterated from his memory. He liſtens to the prophet with attention, melts with the tendereſt compaſſion for the poor ſufferer, and fires with zealous indignation againſt the perpetrator of the horrid crime; not conſidering that it was but a faint repreſentation of the cruelty and injuſtice of his own conduct.

When the heart admits of deliberate ſin, it is not eaſy to ſay where it will ſtop; David, by inordinate deſire, had been led to adultery, and then, to avoid the reſentment of the injured huſband, and remain uninterrupted in his pleaſures, had by a deliberate

liberate ſtratagem contrived to deſtroy him; and, if any of his attendants had openly remonſtrated with him upon his infamous conduct, it is probable, that under the influence of paſſion, and inveſted with authority, he might, inſtead of attending to their advice, have puniſhed them for their raſhneſs. But Nathan, who was a prophet of the Lord, with a boldneſs that truth inſpires, was not afraid of the wrath of an angry Monarch; but, knowing his general character, he firſt, by a parable, rouſes the latent ſpark of religion within, and then applies it with an aptneſs well ſuited to his purpoſe.

In the parable the rich man repreſents David, and the poor man Uriah: none could ſee more clearly than David did, the iniquity of one, who, poſſeſſed of abundance, and enjoying by the goodneſs of heaven, the bleſſings of proſperity, had baſely invaded the property of the poor, and deprived him of the little comforts his humble lot of life afforded; and yet he ſaw not that he was in the ſame ſituation:

king over Iſrael, with poſſeſſions almoſt unlimited, freed from his former poverty and diſtreſs, and ſurrounded with the bounties of Providence, he was not yet ſatisfied with his lot, but indulged an unlawful deſire, and deſtroyed an innocent and worthy character to poſſeſs his inheritance unmoleſted: ſo much had the dignity of ſituation corrupted his heart, and the intenſeneſs of his paſſion blinded his eyes! but no ſooner does the prophet apply the parable "Thou art the man," but his conſcience is ſmitten, and he confeſſes his guilt; and while we muſt ſhudder at the enormity of his crime, we cannot but admire the readineſs and ſincerity of his repentance. In the moſt pathetic terms he bewails his ſin, with the moſt earneſt application ſues for mercy, and in the end, though he is puniſhed with temporal afflictions, his penitence is accepted, and his peace reſtored.

From the whole of this tranſaction it is eaſy to make a few obſervations, that may conduce to our improvement and profit.

I. That it is neceſſary to attend, as David did, to the means of inſtruction; to liſten to the oracles of God; weigh their contents, and acknowledge the truth of ſome general principles. Had the king of Iſrael, like ſome of his ſucceſſors, refuſed to hear the prophet; or had he commanded him, under ſevere threatenings, to prophecy ſmooth things, he had then continued in his iniquity, had hardened his heart againſt the means of reformation, and been made like Ahab a monument of God's wrath. But, in the midſt of his ſin, he had yet a reverence for thoſe ordinances which he had tranſgreſſed; he did not ceaſe to venerate the commandments he had broken; for it does not appear, that the prophet at firſt was an unwelcome viſitant, or that he found any difficulty in delivering his meſſage. Thus ſhould we be ever ready to hear the words of truth, and put ourſelves in the way of ſpiritual information; whatever may be our offences againſt God, it is by the light of his word we muſt diſcover them, diſtinguiſh truth from falſhood, and ſeparate good from evil.

And though this alone is not ſufficient, it is a part of the uſual proceſs required to rectify our opinion and amend our lives; for we may eaſily diſcover that thoſe who wholly neglect the ordinances of religion, ſo far from leaving their iniquities, becoming more pure, upright, and holy,—are on the contrary confirmed in their prejudices, and hardened in their ſin; it is therefore expedient to have an open ear to the meſſage of God, whatever it may be. But we may obſerve further, that it is not only neceſſary to be in the way of hearing the word of God, to be under the ſound of the Goſpel, but we are ſeriouſly to weigh its contents, and form an opinion; we are openly to acknowledge the truths of which we are convinced, nor are we to be unconcerned ſpectators, any more than inattentive hearers of what is delivered; but our paſſions ſhould keep pace with the ſubject. As David's anger was kindled at the baſeneſs of the tranſaction the prophet repreſented, as he felt for the poor man (whoſe lamb being taken away was bereft of his all) ſo ſhould we be actuated by the relations,

relations, and narratives, that are offered to our conſideration; feel a horror at the repreſentation of flagrant crimes, a pleaſure at the removal of evil, an admiration at the diſcovery of the wonders of the Almighty, and freely indulge the ſenſations that various ſubjects are calculated to inſpire: not that this is the ſole end of religion, but it is preparatory to it, as we cannot be informed by what we do not hear, ſo we cannot profit by what we do not feel; but it is poſſible to attend cloſely, to feel acutely, be delighted and affected, and yet ſtop ſhort of the mark.

David had got as far as this before he was truly ſenſible of his own ſtate, before he was inclined to confeſs his own guilt. He had attentively heard, and clearly underſtood the general reaſoning of the prophet; and an honeſt indignation was rouſed againſt the perpetrators of ſo baſe a crime. But all this, though neceſſary, was not enough; this was no more than the preparation to the main buſineſs, the application yet remained to be made, and the principal

effect was yet unwrought. But now was a fit time for its taking place, and the prophet availing himself of the frank declaration of the king on the side of truth and justice, turned his eyes inward upon himself, there to behold the *real* offender, by saying, *thou* art the man:—and equally essential is it, for us to behold ourselves as the identical character represented, whenever we are actually guilty of the offences described. Yet here is the very point at which we are prone to stop; we hear the word, acknowledge its excellence, and admire its principle; but behold not, in the various characters of sinners that are held forth to view, our own resemblance: or if we see any similitude, it makes so slight an impression as to be soon worn off; and we become such hearers as St. James likens to a man, who, beholding his natural face in a glass, goeth away, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was.—This sort of religion is vain. The precepts of God are given us, not for abstract speculation, but for actual practice; not to amuse our fancy, but correct our faults; not

not merely to approve the excellency of their principles, but ſtrictly to apply them to ourſelves; not merely to burn with zeal for the honor of God, and anger againſt ſinners, but to diſcover and remove our own defects; and to do this with ſincerity and effect, it is neceſſary, that the public attendance upon the word of God, ſhould be ſucceeded by private reflection; if public ordinances have made their proper impreſſion, they will lead to retirement and prayer; to apply to our private ſituation what was publicly addreſſed.—The preacher indeed hath not, like Nathan, a particular, but only a general meſſage; he cannot ſay to individuals, your ſin is pride, and yours hypocriſy—he cannot ſay to one, you are diſobedient to parents, and to another, you are unfaithful in your dealings. The application is with yourſelves. He can only ſay, that every precept to be of uſe muſt be applied; and that when alone, and reflecting upon an all-ſeeing God, an awful eternity, and an inevitable judgment, we muſt feel the force of ſacred and eternal truths, with an energy unknown in the

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circle of gaiety or buſtle of life. When alone, the reality of the divine preſence, which equally fills every place, will not only be ſlightly believed, but powerfully felt; that pride which ſin inſpires, and the practice of the world ſtrengthens, will ſink in ſolitude; and a temporary humility take place, which may lead to ſuch a diſcovery of our own hearts, as to produce a continued humble ſpirit.

A general confeſſion of our offences is not ſufficient to produce that contrite heart which is a condition of our pardon with God; the particular inſtances in which we have tranſgreſſed ſhould be recollected and reviewed, in order to lay the foundation of true humiliation and repentance.—When we withdraw from the objects of ſenſe which are continually ſoliciting our attention; when in private we ponder our paths, we may then diſcover deviations from rectitude that were before concealed; we ſhall then feel the propriety of ſomething more than our own merits to gain acceptance with God. Convinced of our need, we

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ſhall then apply in earneſt for that full and free forgiveneſs which is offered us in the Goſpel, through the merits of an immaculate Saviour; and, deeply ſenſible of our entire dependence upon *him* for continual help, we ſhall avail ourſelves by prayer and ordinances, of every opportunity to obtain it; ſhall ſee not only the neceſſity, but beauty of holineſs, and be anxious to be free from the dominion, as well as the guilt of ſin.

A cloſe inſpection of our own conduct will produce humility; humility has a direct tendency to produce a purity of heart; and purity of heart is the only effectual preparation for the enjoyment of true happineſs. When in the mirror of divine truth we behold the image of ſin under ſome ghaſtly form, and an awakened conſcience, faithful to its office, adopts it as our own, it may produce a dreadful ſhock; our nature may ſhudder, and our joys may be ſuſpended; yet it will be a ſhock fatal only to falſe ſecurity and ill-founded hopes, but highly friendly to immediate renova-

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tion and future peace; it will lead us to poſſeſs our ſouls in patience and tranquility here, and elevate our views to thoſe habitations of ſuperior bliſs, which God of his infinite goodneſs, hath prepared for the future and everlaſting inheritance of thoſe that love and obey him.

SER-

SERMON VI.

PHILIPPIANS iv. 8.

Finally, Brethren, whatſoever Things are true, whatſoever Things are honeſt, whatſoever Things are juſt, whatſoever Things are pure, whatſoever Things are lovely, whatſoever Things are of good Report; if there be any Virtue, and if there be any Praiſe, think on theſe Things.

ST. Paul is generally repreſented as a warm vehement orator, and is ſuppoſed to excel more in powerful eloquence than cloſe reaſoning; but however his writings may abound in bold figure and lofty language, they are not, if we examine them attentively, leſs fertile in ſolid argument and unanſwerable concluſion: his writings indeed are of two kinds, one comprehending

ing his controverſies with the churches that had fallen into error; and the other containing general principles of faith and practice applicable to chriſtians in every age, and under all circumſtances.

When he is combating the erroneous doctrines of the new converts, he ſometimes appears abſtruſe to us, becauſe we are not acquainted (nor indeed is it neceſſary that we ſhould be) with all the abſurd opinions that zeal and ignorance in that unſettled ſtate of things produced. But when he is laying down rules for the belief and conduct of the church at large, he is always clear and rational; his remarks are accurate, ſtrictly applicable to the nature and neceſſities of man, and afford a ſyſtem of morals at once complete, and practicable.

The text before us is an eminent inſtance of juſt thought and judicious arrangement; for it contains a ſeries of objects not promiſcuouſly mentioned, but regularly claſſed according to their reſpective values. The firſt, which is Truth, is of

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ſuperior and eternal obligation; the next, though inferior to truth, is of more importance than thoſe which follow, and in general throughout the ſcale, the former is ſtill of more value than the latter.

Viewing the text in this light (which I ſhall endeavour to prove is the true one) it riſes in its conſequence as yielding a twofold advantage; for beſides calling our attention to a number of ſacred and important principles, by which we may oppoſe the abſurd prejudices of the world, and reſiſt the evil propenſities of our nature, it preſents them in ſuch a gradation of excellence as will enable us to determine, when duties of acknowledged obligation ſeem to call us to contrary exertions, which we ought to prefer.

The word *things* alludes to moral ſentiment and action; the epithets *true*, *honeſt*, *juſt*, *pure*, *lovely*, and *good report* are employed as criterions to diſtinguiſh thoſe which in themſelves are good and laudable; and the arrangement aſcertains the degree of

of good which each poſſeſſes. But before I proceed to juſtify my opinion of the diſpoſition of theſe epithets, I ſhall point out the difference between abſolute and relative good, and abſolute and relative evil; for it often happens, that an abſolute good may be a relative evil, and *vice verſa*. Baniſhment in itſelf is an evil, but a criminal condemned to death may ſolicit it as, in his ſituation, a relative good; again, to walk in the air, is an abſolute good, as it promotes health, but if the environs of our habitation be infeſted with aſſaſſins, to walk in the air becomes a relative evil, as it may endanger life; to obey a maſter is a poſitive duty, but if he commands what God forbids, diſobedience is juſtifiable; from whence it appears, that though there are duties of infinite and eternal obligation, there are alſo others which are relative, and dependant upon circumſtances; and if we are not careful to diſtinguiſh primary from ſubordinate principles, we may think we are fulfilling the requiſitions of the goſpel, when we are acting in total oppoſition to its ſpirit and precepts. That

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this is poſſible is apparent from our Lord's words, John xvi. 2. where he not only foretels the ſufferings of his diſciples, but declares, that they which perſecute them, "will think that they do God ſervice;" they will ſo far have miſtaken the nature of truly good actions, by having loſt ſight of eſſential firſt principles. To prevent this fatal error in chriſtians, the apoſtle is careful to lay a foundation for his moral ſtructure that will ſupport the building, and therefore the firſt characteriſtic which he mentions is *truth*, "whatſoever things are *true*;" this he repreſents as having the firſt claim to our attention. Truth is indeed the baſis of all moral excellence; this is indiſpenſibly neceſſary to conſtitute virtue or avoid condemnation; and though it be not the only excellence, it is juſtly eſteemed the chief, and without which any other cannot poſſibly exiſt; for 'if a principle be founded upon an untruth, whatever qualities it may appear to poſſeſs, they muſt be only ſpecious and deluſive, and ſhould be looked upon as no more than falſe colours which dazzle and deceive.'

Truth is ſo eſſential to human virtue and happineſs, that to violate it is direct wickedneſs; to neglect it is conſummate folly; and to be unacquainted with it is great loſs.

Moral truth is compoſed of thoſe indubitable principles, which by nature are impreſſed on the minds of all men; of thoſe which have been communicated by divine revelation; and thoſe determined by the deductions of reaſon: none of which, when known, can be denied without danger of puniſhment, nor neglected without hazarding our happineſs.

Of the violation of this principle, and the conſequent miſery, the word of God abounds in examples; from which I ſhall ſelect the memorable inſtance of the rich man in the goſpel, who falſely promiſed himſelf long life, and much earthly pleaſure, even on the day appointed for his diſſolution.

That man is continually ſubject to death every day's experience abundantly teſtifies; accident

accident or diſeaſe may in a moment, but if not, old age muſt in the end ſoon terminate our exiſtence: this is a truth impreſſed on the minds of all men: that our ſouls ſhall ſurvive the wreck of mortality, and exiſt in a future ſtate, happy or miſerable, according as we have rejected or embraced the opportunities we have enjoyed in this world, is a truth we have received upon divine authority: that the greater is of more importance than the leſs, and conſequently that the concerns of eternity ſhould be preferred to thoſe of time, is a truth fairly made out by the deductions of reaſon; upon theſe things, as things true, and therefore poſſeſſing the higheſt degree of excellence, the apoſtle exhorts us to think; but upon theſe things the rich man in the goſpel did not think; he, as if human life was not frail and uncertain, as if no other world was to ſucceed the preſent; or as if time was of more eſtimation than eternity, ſaid to his ſoul, "Soul, take thy "reſt, for thou haſt goods laid up in ſtore "for many years." He could not have denied, but he ſeems to have overlooked

what a day or an hour may bring forth; amuſed by the ſplendor of his ſituation, and intoxicated with the exceſs of his riches, truths of the greateſt importance are veiled from his ſight; and not conſidering that here every moment changes the ſcene, and that man continueth not in one ſtay, he ſeeks a reſt incompatible with the unſubſtantial tenure of mortality.

But what is the lamentable conſequence? —his deſigns are at once overturned, his ſchemes are completely diſconcerted; he had neglected truth, and there is no other ſolid foundation for moral virtue or laſting happineſs: "This night ſhall thy ſoul be "required of thee," was a ſentence which he inevitably muſt at ſome time, and might at any time hear; this therefore ſhould have been attended to in the formation of all his plans; this ſhould have regulated their nature and limited their extent; without this he might indeed erect ſomething pleaſing to the ſight, but nothing ſafe to inhabit: the experiment was made, and the failure is upon record. In a moment,

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the ſand upon which he had built his enchanting edifice, crumbled from beneath the fabric, his hopes vaniſhed in air, and he found himſelf overwhelmed in aſtoniſhment and ruin.

I might have adduced many inſtances of the deſtruction ariſing from the violation or neglect of truth; but I ſelected this as being moſt common; for though all upon the ſlighteſt alluſions acknowledge the frailty and uncertainty of life, yet few have it ſufficiently in their recollection; or act as if they received it as an indubitable principle:—but leaving this among other truths of which we are equally convinced to operate on the mind as firſt principles, I proceed to the next deſcription of things the apoſtle recommends to our attention.

"Whatſoever things are honeſt." The word honeſt is a remarkable inſtance of the effect of time, in altering the meaning of terms—this word in our language at the time of the tranſlation of the Bible, had the ſame ſignification as the Greek σεμνὸς.

for which it ſtands, and which means, grave and venerable, and alludes to any thing that ſeems worthy of our eſtimation, becauſe it has previouſly gained the general eſtimation of mankind; by an honeſt family was originally meant not merely one that was juſt, and what we *now* call honeſt, but implied one that was reputable, venerable, and civilized, in oppoſition to low, mean, and unnoticed.

And in this ſenſe the word muſt be underſtood here, as applying to opinions and rules of conduct, rendered venerable by the antiquity of their inſtitution, or the univerſality of their reception.—St. Paul, though accuſed of being a diſturber and mover of ſedition, here evinces a very contrary character, and lays it down as a principle next to truth itſelf, that we ſhould follow and venerate the opinions of our anceſtors, and the inſtitutions of our country, provided they do not militate againſt what is ſtill more ſacred and of eternal conſequence; nothing, not even the authority of kings, nor the ſanction of multitudes,

titudes, can juſtify our adherence to principles we know or believe in our hearts to be founded in error.

Truth is eternal and immutable, and as far as we can clearly apprehend it, by the exertions of our own faculties, aſſiſted by the light of ſcripture, we are to hold it faſt in oppoſition to every inferior conſideration.

But though it be the duty of all to examine for themſelves, as far as time, talents, and opportunity admit, yet it can fall to the lot of few fully to inveſtigate the truth of every principle by which our conduct muſt be regulated; we are therefore highly indebted to providence in the firſt inſtance, and to the labors of our anceſtors in the ſecond, for a ſyſtem of religious and moral rules, which, while they neither preclude nor even check enquiry, ſerve as immediate directories to peace, virtue, and happineſs: nor is the length of their continuance and generality of reception mean arguments of their truth and

utility; they afford at leaſt ſtrong preſumptive proof in their favor; we therefore ſhould not wait till we can prove them *right* before we adopt them: if we cannot prove them *wrong*, they ought to have an immediate and continued influence on our conduct.

The regard of individuals for the general welfare, which cannot exiſt without a veneration for general opinion, is the grand bond of civil ſociety; and as this is one great ſource of temporal felicity, to preſerve it from violation muſt be a matter of conſiderable importance: the aſſiſtance and relief that flow from the good will of individuals, would be of little avail, did not the reſtraining influence of a body politic afford a more general and ample ſecurity from the malice and depredations of the wicked.

Therefore, to ſtrengthen and confirm this union, by falling in with the advice of our parents, and complying with the inſtitutions of our country; by ſubmitting to the

the opinions of the wiſe, and imitating the examples of the good, compoſes a conſiderable branch of our duty, as it comprehends what in the text are called things honeſt; that is, things grave, decent, and venerable.

The apoſtle having directed our attention firſt to things true, as the neceſſary foundation of every principle, either general or particular, and then to a veneration for the combined reaſon of mankind, to inſure that ſimilarity of opinion and conduct eſſential to the proſperity of civil ſociety, proceeds to "things juſt."

As the laſt provided for public utility, this regards individual good; and is a principle by which we reſtrain that propenſity to ſelf-intereſt, which is prevalent in all, and in ſome ſo far preponderates as to extirpate integrity from the heart, at the ſame time that it preſerves its appearance in the external deportment. The term juſt, has the ſame meaning here as the term honeſt in its preſent acceptation;—the

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open violation of which, is ſo immediately connected with diſgrace and puniſhment, that it is not neceſſary to ſpend much time in enforcing it as a chriſtian duty; I ſhall only therefore advert to that ſtrict mental juſtice which is too apt to eſcape common obſervation.

All will acknowledge, that a contract once made ought to be fulfilled, and that every obligation entered into ſhould be deemed inviolate—but all do not acknowledge, and ſome do not perceive, that juſtice may be violated in the very making of a contract; for if the ignorance of thoſe with whom we deal expoſe them to impoſition, the man who takes advantage of ſuch a ſituation is not juſt; and ſhould we diſcern a miſtake, though in our own favor, chriſtian equity requires that we rectify it with equal alacrity, as if it were againſt us.

When the ſtern hand of neceſſity compels a needy brother to offer terms by which he muſt be injured, if we greedily catch

catch at this advantage produced by his diſtreſs, and conclude a bargain to which his poverty and not his judgment conſents, it is unjuſt, and falls under the horrid deſcription of villainy, which the prophet calls "grinding the face of the poor:" theſe are actions contrary to things juſt; and notwithſtanding thoſe who are guilty of them may preſerve their character, they unqueſtionably forfeit their chriſtianity. By the principles of our holy profeſſion, we are prohibited from giving an indirect and evaſive anſwer; there are queſtions improper and impertinent which we need not anſwer at all, but whenever we do, the meaning of the heart muſt fully correſpond with the language of the tongue: our yea muſt be yea, and our nay muſt be nay, whatſoever is more than theſe cometh of evil. The tender conſcience of a real chriſtian rejects every degree of mental reſervation; on proper occaſions he may conceal his ſentiments, and in imitation of our Lord refuſe to anſwer; but on no account will he diſguiſe them, or, by equivocal language, attempt to appear what he

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is not; a temporizing conduct may ſometimes lead to fortune or exalt to rank; but upon theſe, if they are to be gained by indirect means, a good man looks down with contempt; he is in the purſuit of a better inheritance, and aims at an higher character: in his eſtimation the hopes of heaven exceed riches, and no title is ſo truly elevated as that of "an Iſraelite without guile."

Next to "things juſt" the apoſtle properly ranks "things pure:" it is too common with the world at large, defective as the practice and opinions of their juſtice are, to reſt there; for having, in their own view of things, maintained their integrity, they think that indulging in every exceſs and impurity is little or no crime: we abſtain, ſay they, from injuring the property of another, and therefore in whatever mode we conduct ourſelves, it cannot be an heinous offence. But this ſhews that they have accepted of the magiſtrate rather than God for their ruler; that an act of parliament is more their ſtandard of excellence than

than the Bible, and that the letter of the law is preferred to the ſpirit of holineſs. For the apoſtle, though he has not placed it as the firſt requiſite, has yet made purity an eſſential part of chriſtian virtue.

Pure in this place means chaſte, in an extended ſenſe, and is oppoſed to every thing vile, groſs, or filthy; glaring crimes are not the only objects of a true chriſtian's abhorrence; he will ſtrive to abſtain from every appearance of evil, and labor to acquire a purity of thought. For though he allow himſelf to participate in many of the pleaſures of the world, he will always have an eye to their tendency, that recreation may not invade the bounds of innocence.

The laws of man muſt neceſſarily be confined to the reſtraining of open acts of violation, but the Goſpel provides for our ſecurity more compleatly by oppoſing the evil in an earlier ſtage; it aims not only at the prevention of the injury, but the deſtruction of the motive: it recommends that purity of heart which will not only

withhold the hand from the commiſſion of a crime, but effectually eradicate the deſire: to follow whatſoever things are pure, we muſt ſit in judgment upon our own thoughts, and eject thoſe that have even a diſtant tendency to offence, till we acquire that dove-like ſimplicity of manner, and that inoffenſiveneſs of ſpirit, which will prevent the turbulence of paſſion, and prepare us for the calm and peaceful enjoyment of every temporal bleſſing.

But having recommended in their place "things *pure*," the apoſtle proceeds to "things *lovely*," and thus leads us from what purifies to what refines, exalts, and adorns our nature.

To be juſt is to abſtain from actual injury, and to be pure is to be void of mental; did Chriſtians follow the divine exhortation thus far, much would be done, but much would yet remain undone; it is true, that then the wicked would ceaſe from troubling, and the weary would be at reſt; but this is rather a negative than a

poſitive good; the foundation of peace is indeed laid, but the fountain of felicity remains unopened. To enjoy the full bleſſing of the Goſpel, the ſoil of the heart, cleared from the rank weeds of corrupted nature, muſt be impregnated with divine and fertile ſeeds, that will bring forth ſpiritual and immortal fruit, ſome ſixty, and ſome an hundred fold; "things *lovely*" muſt ſucceed to "things *pure*."

Under the term *lovely* are comprehended what may be ſtyled the active virtues, which excite the finer ſenſations of the human heart; theſe are—gratitude, generoſity, benevolence, conjugal affection, filial duty, brotherly love, and univerſal charity.

Theſe inſpire a pleaſure that will never cloy; theſe give birth to the warmeſt and moſt delightful feelings of the human heart; theſe ſupply a joy in which the mind, the nobleſt part of man, not only partakes but predominates; the happineſs reſulting from theſe bids defiance to time and ſeaſons; theſe mitigate the ſevere rigours of poverty,

verty, and ſanctify the poſſeſſion of riches; theſe afford the cloudleſs ſunſhine of the breaſt, that warms and enlivens amid the ſtorms of affliction and the convulſions of nature.

But we need not expatiate on the excellence or value of theſe virtues, for the world coincides with St. Paul in calling them lovely. However the exerciſe of the chriſtian virtues may be generally neglected, the practice of them is generally commended, and their beneficial effects are ſo congenial to the human heart that they are univerſally admired.—This ſeems to involve a contradiction, but human conduct in general holds out a paradox, which it requires cloſe inveſtigation to elucidate; the actions and the principles of men are almoſt at conſtant variance; they praiſe one line of conduct and purſue another; they are conſtantly ſtruck with the intrinſic worth of theſe virtues when exhibited in others which they reject themſelves: the apoſtle, aware of their readineſs to admire, and their reluctance to practiſe, forbears

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to enter into the detail of what is "lovely," and contents himſelf with earneſtly exhorting them to the performance.

It would not be difficult, without the aid of high colouring, or laboured embelliſhment, by a ſimple relation of the efforts of generoſity and compaſſion, to excite the tear of ſenſibility, and extort the ſentence of admiration; but it is eaſier to moiſten the eye than to melt the heart; it is not the play of the feelings, but the convictions of reaſon, that will ſink deep in the mind, and be operative in the conduct.

A tranſient ſenſation, or a caſual act, cannot in the full ſenſe of the word, be called "lovely;" theſe may produce a ſplendid, but it will a fading image; if we would realize the picture, and form the heart to theſe noble virtues, we muſt, according to the apoſtle's reaſoning, previouſly expel that injuſtice and impurity which are incompatible with the exiſtence of what is truly amiable; the ſelfiſh and the ſen-

ſual, though they may occaſionally admire, can only in a ſmall degree partake of the advantages of the nobler virtues; but the pure and diſintereſted will be bleſt with the plenitude of their excellenee.

Many taſte not the beſt felicities of life, becauſe they ſee not the neceſſity and inſeparable connection between virtue and happineſs; they falſely imagine that riches and rank are the ſole, or at leaſt the principle ſources of enjoyment, though it requires but a ſmall degree of diſcernment to perceive, that wealth and diſtinction inſpire pride in the poſſeſſor, and envy in the beholder; and give birth to many paſſions incompatible with peace, and inconſiſtent with true felicity. In the oracles of truth, we never find riches or ſplendor enumerated among thoſe things which ſhould incite our deſire, or engage our attention, but are directed to the acquiſition of virtue as the only means to ennoble the heart, advance the happineſs, and complete the character of a Chriſtian. But there is yet another particular recommended by the apoſtle,

apoſtle, and with which he concludes the ſacred catalogue.

"Whatſoever things are of good report." This is that attention to the opinion of the public, the temper of the times, and the diſpoſition of the company we are called to frequent, which the chriſtian is not only allowed, but for the ſake of peace commanded to pay; this is what St. Paul in another place calls "becoming all things to all men, that he might win ſome;" but this muſt neceſſarily be confined to things otherwiſe indifferent, and cannot extend to the violation of any of the more important principles previouſly inculcated. When Daniel reſided in the court of Nebuchadnezzar, it may be preſumed that he complied with many ceremonies generally obſerved, and claimed no exemption from cuſtoms innocent and indifferent.

But when an edict was iſſued, reſtraining him from the exerciſe of that religion which he knew was founded in truth, and the worſhip of the only true and living

God, then he conſcientiouſly preſerved his integrity at the hazard of his life: and when the worſhipping of a king, which on that occaſion was a thing of good report, came in competition with his duty to his Creator, which was a principle poſſeſſing all the other previous excellencies, he heſitated not in the determination, but, regardleſs of conſequences, deſpiſed the impending ruin that ſeemed to await him, and evinced, that with him truth and duty were the prime conſiderations.

As far therefore as things of good report interfere not with things of ſuperior conſequence, and poſſeſſing higher qualities, it is a duty to ſacrifice to the preſent opinions and prevailing modes of ſociety, and not affect an obſtinate ſingularity founded in pride, and productive of contention. But when popular prejudice requires the omiſſion of things "lovely," the commiſſion of things "impure," the violation of things "juſt," the deſpiſing of things "venerable," or the renunciation of things "true," then

then reſiſtance becomes a duty, and compliance a crime.

The apoſtle, having thus exhibited a complete ſeries of gradual excellence, endeavours (after informing their underſtanding) to animate their zeal; and adds powerful perſuaſion to clear inſtruction.

He firſt appeals to their own hearts, whether, by univerſal conſent, ſome principles be not neceſſary for the formation of their conduct, and the attainment of exalted and rational happineſs; and whether the approbation of God, and the praiſe of men be not the beſt foundation and moſt diſcriminating teſt of the excellence and propriety of ſuch principles.

Conſcious that they could not anſwer in the negative, he takes the poſition for granted, that ſome principles are neceſſary to form a rule of life; and, aware that they could not impeach the ſoundneſs of his doctrine, that there was not only no better, but no other way to peace and felicity,

licity, earneſtly ſolicits them to " think on theſe things."

Had I not already exhauſted your time, I might eaſily enlarge on the important word " think," as the hinge upon which the whole muſt eventually turn. The ſoundneſs of our principles is indeed of eſſential conſequence; but the beſt regulated articles of faith, the moſt accurate ſyſtem of goſpel-truths, iſſued by infinite wiſdom, and tranſmitted from heaven, will be uſeleſs, till cloſely applied. It is not the heavenly gifts that have been imparted, but the uſe we make of them, which will render us happy: neglected, they will operate to condemnation, and render us far more culpable than thoſe, whoſe guilt is not aggravated by ample knowledge and abundant means of grace.

It is not enough that we aſſent to the truth, through the force of irreſiſtible conviction; we muſt love, as well as believe the doctrines communicated by inſpiration. They muſt be pondered in the mind, implanted

planted in the heart, and approved by the underſtanding, as the greateſt good we can poſſeſs; till they mix with all our thoughts, and operate in meliorating our diſpoſitions, purifying our intentions, exalting our views, and invigorating our powers.

In this the righteous principally differs from the wicked, that the former liſtens to the warning voice of wiſdom, is obedient to his high and holy calling, and has heaven and happineſs daily in nearer view, while the latter remains like "the wild aſs's colt," browzing on the unſatisfying brambles of the wilderneſs, and neglecting the celeſtial manna, which, abundantly ſcattered by divine bounty, in vain ſolicits his acceptance. He neglects every improvement of his immortal powers; is alarmed at the very thought of death and eternity; and at their awful approach will be utterly confounded.

To avoid this moſt tremendous evil, and to obtain the higheſt of all enjoyments, and the moſt precious of all bleſſings, let

us permit the ſound that reaches the ear, to make it's effectual way to the mind: let us "commune with our hearts and be ſtill." The reſult of ſerious conſideration will be a full perſuaſion of the excellence, conſpicuous in thoſe deſirable objects, recommended by the apoſtle; the ardent and effectual purſuit of which will not only ſecure the favour of God, but alſo obtain the willing plaudits, or, at leaſt, extort the reluctant approbation of men.

Let us call to our aid holy reſolution, that we may not gradually become inattentive to the things which belong to our eternal peace. Let us ſet apart certain portions of our time for the examination of our progreſs in the divine life, by a retroſpect of our thoughts, actions, and diſpoſitions: in this holy employment let us have recourſe to ſincere and ardent prayer; which will be anſwered by a communication of ſacred energy, ſtrengthening our good purpoſes, and triumphing over the infirmities of nature. We ſhall return to our ſecular avocations with every good inclination

clination renewed and animated; and as the countenance of Moſes, when he deſcended from the mount, where he had converſed with Deity, diſcovered ſeraphic brightneſs, which ſtruck the beholders with admiration; ſo will our conduct and deportment retain an indelible impreſſion of that divine grace, which we have ſucceſsfully ſolicited: we ſhall thus advance towards that ſtate of purity and happineſs, which is the future portion of the righteous; and conſider death no longer as an object of terror, but as our paſſport to the regions of life and immortality.

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SERMON VII.

EPHESIANS iv. 26.

Be ye angry, and ſin not.

THE diſorder of the paſſions is the grand ſource of all the moral evil that exiſts in the world; and the exceſſive indulgence and inordinate exerciſe of affections, innocent and pure in themſelves, have produced that abundance of ſin and miſery, which has overwhelmed the human race.

All the commands of God tend to the preſervation of order, the promotion of peace, and the eſtabliſhment of happineſs; and therefore we, by offending againſt the divine law, break thoſe reſtraints, within which it is neceſſary that the powers of our nature

nature ſhould be confined; and by oppoſing the divine will, violate that harmony in which the perfection of creation conſiſts. To point out the deviation of man from the path of rectitude, the law was given; and to accompliſh his reſtoration to propriety was divine aſſiſtance communicated: to diſcover clearly the folly of our departure from God, and the fatal conſequences of continuing at a ſpiritual diſtance from him, was the light of the goſpel afforded; and to procure a reconciliation, it was fraught with the moſt ample aſſurances of the poſſibility of a return, the kindeſt invitations to accept the offers of almighty aſſiſtance, and the moſt convincing proofs of the eternal advantages reſulting from our concurrence in the wonderful and beneficent deſigns of the all-wiſe and all-bountiful Creator of the univerſe.

We are not required to eradicate, but to rectify the affections of our nature; and for this end the line is accurately marked out; our deviations are delineated, in ſcripture, with an unerring hand; and the beauty

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of holineſs ſet before us in a ſtriking light. It is true, that ſo wide has been our departure from rectitude, and ſo ſtrong, through the influence of habit, our propenſity to evil, that the difficulty of our return, and the greatneſs of the change, have been juſtly and beautifully repreſented by our Lord as the acquiſition of a new nature; "Ye muſt be born again:" the affections muſt be transferred to new objects, and confined by new limitations; but they are only to be transferred to thoſe objects, which were in uniſon with them when innocent and uncorrupt; and the ultimate deſign of the Goſpel is to reduce them within thoſe bounds, by which happineſs is encircled, and miſery excluded: therefore, clearly to ſee the neceſſity of the moral precepts of our Lord, is to diſcern our deviation from innocence and purity; and to comply with them is to return into the path of peace and happineſs, which we have relinquiſhed.

The requiſite change of the deſires, the additional light in the underſtanding, and the

the turning the current of the affections into purer channels, are the proper operation of the new birth; and this chriſtian renovation is very different from mere external decency of manners, and infinitely ſuperior to a ſimple reformation of our moral conduct; ſince theſe only reſtrain our actions within thoſe limits which our temporal intereſt preſcribes, while the evangelic change conquers our nature, and expels the principle of evil from the heart.

To diſcover whether we are merely moral, or truly chriſtian; whether the immediate advantages of a regular life, or a pure love of holineſs be our real motive, we muſt not advert to our conduct as it reſpects enormous crimes, but to the leſs ſtriking, though more conſtant actions of our lives: if flagrant vices ſtain our character, it is evident that we have no pretenſions either to religion or morality; thoſe groſs enormities, which ſhock the decency of ſinful man, muſt be peculiarly offenſive to a holy God: but though we reſtrain our actions within the limits which men preſcribe,

ſcribe, and thus obtain a good report among our fellow-mortals, yet it does not follow that we are actuated by the purer motives of chriſtianity, and influenced by the fear and love of God. Many acts that ſpeak the corruption of the heart, are not only over-looked, but even juſtified by the natural man, who may ſtill appear highly to reverence morality, and even ſometimes aſpire to the chriſtian character; of this kind none can be found more contrary to religious purity than anger; yet none more frequently admitted by human depravity, and defended by human ſophiſtry. To conſider it therefore may be uſeful, as a criterion, whether we have yielded a full obedience to the Goſpel of Chriſt, or only partially practiſed thoſe moral virtues, the groſs infringement of which would have affected our preſent tranquility, and expoſed us to the cenſure of the world. An enquiry into the objects, meaſure, and effects of our anger, will greatly tend to diſcover the nature of our faith, and the purity of our obedience.

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The words of the text evidently diſcover, that there is an anger which is not ſinful: our religion does not require that we ſhould diveſt ourſelves of the feelings attached to our nature, but forbids us to indulge them in an improper degree, nor does it require us to be inſenſible of offences, in commanding us cordially to forgive them; ſince it is impoſſible to exerciſe forgiveneſs, without a prior ſenſe of the injury.

When the tender and pious parent diſcovers his child wandering from the way of righteouſneſs, reſiſting authority, offending God, and treading the devious paths that lead to miſery, it is impoſſible that he ſhould be pleaſed; it is his duty to be angry. When the faithful teacher ſees his ſalutary monitions diſregarded, his neceſſary injunctions diſobeyed, he would forfeit his fidelity, and violate his truſt, if he did not ſhew that he was offended by unambiguous marks of diſapprobation. To behold the virtuous and the vicious with the ſame complacency is criminal; to reward

ward indiſcriminately the meritorious and the unworthy, is to confound order and deſtroy the effects of education; to forbear rebuke or withhold puniſhment, in a reſponſible ſituation, is not only weakneſs but ſin, the neglect of an important charge, to which divine Providence has annexed authority.

But even on thoſe occaſions which excite, and in thoſe ſituations which juſtify rational anger, we are in great danger of improper emotions and ſinful actions: unleſs we view temporal objects in the mirror of the Goſpel, with minds elevated to God for direction, and tempers habituated to chriſtian diſcipline, the exerciſe of our anger will become the gratification of a malevolent paſſion, inſtead of the mild, though firm performance of a painful duty.

The anger of a chriſtian therefore differs from that of a natural man, however moral in his conduct, not only in the objects to which it is directed, but ſtill more in the degree to which it is indulged. He who

who does not make the precepts of religion the rule of his actions, may indeed ſometimes be offended on occaſions ſimilar to thoſe which call forth the zealous remonſtrances of the votary of true religion; but will not reſtrain his reſentment within thoſe limits, which a ſincere deſire to advance the temporal and eternal happineſs of others would ſuggeſt, nor confine it to the cauſe from which it originated. The Chriſtian is fearful leſt his indignation ſhould, by its violence, prevent thoſe ſalutary purpoſes, which he is deſirous to accompliſh. The man uninfluenced by religion ſecretly rejoices at an occaſion of reproaching thoſe, who, from inferiority of ſituation, cannot be expected to converſe with him on equal terms, and uſually mingles with his remonſtrances ſevere and ungenerous reflections, which tend rather to raiſe diſguſt than produce amendment.

There are circumſtances where to be angry with his ſuperiors would be juſt; when ſubmiſſion is puſillanimity, and acquieſcence hypocriſy; yet here he can ſtifle

juſtifiable reſentment, reſerving the violence of his rage for the weak, the humble, and the helpleſs. Even children, who are, when virtuous, a ſource of happineſs, are often conſidered by ſuch a man as the chief fountain of his delight; the only baſis of his future hopes. When this is not the caſe, and they unfortunately prove refractory to his will, and depraved in their diſpoſition, when they diſobey his commands, and thwart his views, he will be angry indeed, and with ſufficient cauſe; but his anger will not be without ſin, ſince this world has firm poſſeſſion of his heart while he labours to preſerve the appearance of morality. Mortified at the diſappointment of his expectations, he will be moved more by reſentment againſt their perſons, than by anxiety for their recovery: his temper, ſoured by diſappointment, will vent itſelf in a thouſand improper and ineffectual reproaches, calculated rather to impel them forward in their diſobedient career, than to invite their return to the path of duty. A parent fondly and ignorantly indulging ambitious views with reſpect to children, who

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by their vice and folly impede his deſigns, is uſually angry not ſo much at the ſinfulneſs as at the effect of their conduct. It is the forfeiture of their advancement, not the violation of their duty, that gives offence. By ſuch a parent an extravagant ſon, who had irretrievably ruined his fortune, would be caſt off for ever; in vain, though penitent, would he ſue for pardon and reconciliation: however contrite his heart, however ſincere his repentance, as they could not recal his diſſipated eſtate, and elevate him to the lofty ſituation which the vain parent had figured to his mind, all his humble and ſincere acknowledgments could not mollify that anger, which aroſe from a diſappointment in worldly views.

Awful indeed is the thought, yet too frequently realized, that a ſuppliant child, by the moſt earneſt and pathetic entreaties, by the moſt unfeigned and ſubmiſſive humiliation, has in vain endeavoured to appeaſe the wrath of an offended parent; and inſtances are not wanting, where the for-

did and ambitious have proved their hearts ſo faſtened on the world, even at the moment of leaving it, that they could not cordially forgive the leaſt indiſcretion of their children. They have felt, it is true, in common with others, tenderneſs for their offspring; but their miſtaken notions, and depraved views, have given it an ill direction: as their own deſires were riveted to earth, and their own hopes circumſcribed by time, they have endeavoured to form the minds of their children by the ſame principles, and give their actions the ſame bias; thus their departure from virtue has been eaſily forgiven, while their inattention to intereſt has remained an unpardonable crime.

But the anger of a Chriſtian, as it is founded on a different baſis, is appeaſed by different means, and regulated by different principles. He will, if a parent, think himſelf awfully reſponſible not only for the preſent proſperity of his children, but alſo for their virtuous and religious conduct: the promiſe, that if "trained in the way

way they ſhould go, they will not depart from it," will induce him earneſtly to exert himſelf for their ſpiritual improvement. Should an untoward diſpoſition riſe againſt parental authority, and ſtubborn reſiſtance appear where filial duty might be expected; the Chriſtian parent muſt and ought to be angry: his expreſſions muſt aſſume a harſher tone, and the kindneſs that yet dwells in his boſom lie concealed; but his anger will be directed againſt the evil of their conduct, in proportion as it deviates from the requiſitions of the Almighty; every puniſhment will be inflicted, and every indulgence withheld, with a view to a recovery from ſin, and a return to virtue. Anger againſt vice, in a Chriſtian, will not be a paſſion that obſcures reaſon, and deranges the ſyſtem of ſelf-government, but a ſolemn feeling which, though ſuſpending enjoyment, will not deſtroy peace: it will not vent itſelf in ungovernable rage; but with ſolicitous anxiety adopt ſuch ſteady meaſures, as may tend to remove the evil, and reſtore the offender; and ſhould he,

even after atrocious tranſgreſſion, exhibit evident ſymptoms of genuine repentance; parental tenderneſs, watchful for the joyous event, will inſtantaneouſly relax the rigor of anger, and invite by encreaſing love the return of the diſobedient to the path of duty. Whatever may have been the fatal conſequences of his deviation, with reſpect to worldly advantages, they will not be a bar to chriſtian reconciliation. If the mind be recovered to a dependence on God, and the exerciſe of virtue, the heart of a parent, who has a juſt idea of true and eternal felicity, will be elate with rapture, and his arms willingly extended to the returning prodigal; but if anger, in any caſe, is carried beyond the repentance of the offender, or expreſſed in a manner inconſiſtent with the diſcipline neceſſary to recovery, it is ſinful.

Though there are caſes, where a degree of anger is juſtifiable, they are few, in compariſon of thoſe, where it wholly ariſes from unſubdued pride, an ungovernable ſpirit,

ſpirit, or a malevolent diſpoſition: this diſtinction is ſeldom accurately made, and ſeldomer properly regarded. A captious temper apt to take offence, a peeviſh habit of ſudden irritation, and a quick ſenſe of real or ſuppoſed injuries, are frequently overlooked by the poſſeſſor, as trivial failings, and even ſometimes defended, as becoming and neceſſary. But the believer, who is taught of God, knows that they are not only incompatible with the ornament of a meek and quiet ſpirit, but utterly ſubverſive of chriſtian grace and peaceful fellowſhip. Impreſſed with the neceſſity of habitually examining his own heart, he will not only enquire what actions he commits, but will conſider what ſpirit he is of. He knows that though the abſtaining from ſome bad actions, and performing ſome good ones, will obtain him a character among men; yet only the uniform motions of the heart, and the general tenor of his conduct, can obtain the approbation of God, and entitle him to the appellation of Chriſtian. Love is the fulfilling of the law, as

it assimilates us to the divine likeness, and operates for the happiness of man; but anger, except in the case of an authoritative check to wickedness, is of an opposite complexion, and produces contrary effects. Anger, not under the regulation of religion, is, in its slightest impulse, a corrupt ebullition of depraved nature, destructive of peace; if it rises to resentment it is founded in pride; but if it seeks revenge, it has its source in malevolence.

It will however be contended, that we should separate the intention of the mind from the feelings incident to the texture of our frame; that some are constitutionally irritable, and born with more hasty and ungovernable tempers than others. This we grant may be true, and will account for the difference that exists in uncultivated minds with respect to remarkable heat or frigidity of disposition; but it will not justify the continuance of an evil, which the precepts of Christianity condemn, and which its discipline would remove. If our religion does

does not ſucceſsfully counteract and eventually ſubdue the perverſeneſs of our tempers, it is not properly efficacious, and cannot be cordially received; for the Goſpel is calculated, by diſcovering the depravity of nature, to ſtrike at the root of human pride: the wonderful mode of our redemption, if believed and accepted, muſt excite our love; and then the precepts of Chriſtianity are adequate to direct our conduct; to reduce our warring paſſions to peace, and our rebellious tempers to obedience. The Almighty knows our frame; he remembereth that we are but duſt; he will not be extreme to mark every deviation from his holy law; but he hath provided, in his Goſpel, that we may improve daily in ſanctification of our lives, and that theſe deviations may continually diminiſh.

In the preſent inſtance, the advice that follows the text is admirably adapted to this ſalutary purpoſe; "Let not the ſun go down upon your wrath;" this is a precept, that cannot be neglected without forfeiting

feiting our Chriſtianity; and which, if obeyed, will conquer the moſt paſſionate, reſentful, and malevolent diſpoſition. At the concluſion of the day, when, exhauſted by fatigue, we are compelled to ſubmit to the helpleſs inactivity of ſleep, the pious mind will ſeek protect on from that God, who hath promiſed to hear us for the ſake of our bleſſed Redeemer. In the ſolemn exerciſe, he will acknowledge his tranſgreſſions, and recollect the only condition on which he can be pardoned. He is taught by his Redeemer to ſay, "Forgive us our treſpaſſes, as we forgive them that treſpaſs againſt us." The formal and unthinking may repeat the words; but the Chriſtian will feel their force, and ſtrictly examine whether, by his improper conduct or captious temper, any friend has been eſtranged from his boſom; whether any ſuſceptible mind has been wounded by his aſperity, or any petty offence has excited his diſguſt.

Imploring pardon for his own offences, he will ſee the neceſſity of diſmiſſing every reſent-

reſentful ſentiment. He will conſider a propenſity to anger as a great addition to his crimes, and humbly ſupplicating forgiveneſs for his former indulgence of this unſocial paſſion, will pray for ſtrength to ſubdue its turbulent emotions. His earneſt petition will not be preſented in vain; divine Grace will communicate energy to chriſtian reſolution; and his mind will be impreſſed with ſo ſtrong a ſenſe of the unmerited mercy of God, that he will be unable to retain enmity for the little injuries committed by a feeble fellow-mortal. The principle of love to his Creator, and to his fellow-creatures, will take ſuch full poſſeſſion of his ſoul, that this evil habit muſt give way to brotherly affection; and if at the cloſe of evening every angry effort is daily checked, he will ſee the folly of indulging for a moment what he muſt ſoon diſmiſs, till at length the abſurdity and wickedneſs of an angry and turbulent ſpirit, will ſtrike him in the very act; till ſuch a happy change of diſpoſition be acquired, that ſtrifes and envyings give place

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to the peaceable fruits of righteouſneſs; which, by a ſtrict adherence to the pure precepts of our Lord, and the conſtant imitation of his divine example, God of his infinite mercy grant may be our happy experience.

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SERMON VIII.

2 TIM. iii. 4.

Lovers of Pleaſures more than Lovers of God.

IN this chapter St. Paul informs Timothy, that the Chriſtian Church would not always retain that ſimplicity of love, that ſtrict union, and that purity of manners, which marked the conduct of the firſt converts. "In the laſt days," ſays the Apoſtle, "perilous times ſhall come; for men ſhall be lovers of their ownſelves;" that inordinate ſelf-love, prevalent in our corrupt nature, but now, among Chriſtians, overpowered by the ſublime and extenſive charity of the Goſpel, ſhall again, in an undue degree, revive among profeſſors. He then proceeds to enumerate a catalogue of vices, which it would naturally intro-

introduce; and as a mark, by which theſe degenerate Chriſtians might be known, calls them "lovers of pleaſure, more than lovers of God."

Yet in the next verſe he adds, "that they ſhould ſtill retain the form of godlineſs, but deny its power." True religion is pure and undefiled; but there is alſo a religion of a different complection, accommodated to the luxury of the age. We doubt not, but in the moſt depraved times, there are ſome, who venerate and obſerve the pure and ſpiritual precepts of Chriſtianity; but there are others, who, without an inward change of heart, only comply with the external forms of worſhip, while they are governed by principles contrary to thoſe of our moſt holy faith.

And though, when a profeſſor has forſaken the right path, it is not eaſy to ſay what courſe he may purſue, ſo various and irregular are the wanderings of deviation; yet, in a luxurious age, and in a country where the elegancies of life abound, the

number cannot be few, who, in their departure from the ſimplicity of the Goſpel, are carried unwarrantable lengths by the immoderate purſuit of pleaſure. At the ſame time that they make a decent profeſſion, and pay ſome attention to the ſervice of religion, they are captivated by the falſe delights of gaiety and diſſipation, and are in ſubjection to the God of this world.

It is however impoſſible to attend, with any degree of ſtrictneſs and regularity, upon divine ordinances, without abſtaining from ſome flagrant and notorious crimes. We hear, from the word of truth, of the juſt and the unjuſt; the holy and the profane; and are informed, that joy and miſery will be the different portions of theſe reſpective characters. We cannot therefore eaſily content ourſelves with a conduct wicked in exceſs, and for which no palliation could be ſuggeſted: but, avoiding the extreme of wickedneſs, we do not ſo eaſily diſcern the innumerable train of evil diſpoſitions; which, though leſs horrid in appearance,

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are yet inconſiſtent with the requiſitions of religion, and highly offenſive to God.

The Apoſtle, in the preceding verſes, mentions a conſiderable number of vices, without naming murder, adultery, theft, ſabbath-breaking, drunkenneſs, and ſuch crimes as would baniſh us from religious ſociety, and deſtroy our reputation. But he enumerates as equally dangerous, pride, inſincerity, diſobedience to parents, ſlander, ingratitude, and thoſe evil habits, which uſually inſinuate themſelves into the heart of man. Theſe, without immediately injuring his character, or neceſſitating him formally to renounce his principles, are deſtructive of religious purity, and incompatible with genuine Chriſtianity.

But of all the attacks on human virtue, none are more diſguiſed, or more fatal, than thoſe that are made in the form of pleaſure: and therefore we are ſo frequently warned, in ſcripture, againſt the danger of an enemy, at once ſo alluring and ſo deſtructive. In order that we may be able

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to diſcern this real, though often unperceived foe, and to reject, with chriſtian fortitude, the palatable poiſon offered to our taſte, I ſhall enquire into the meaning of the word pleaſure; explain what it is to love pleaſure more than God; ſhew the abſurdity of ſuch a diſpoſition; and adduce ſome arguments, that may lead us to adopt a more juſt and noble rule of action.

The world in general divide the pleaſures of this life into innocent and guilty: yet though this definition might be ſuppoſed ſufficient to teach them what to indulge, and what to reject, they are generally ſo far from being rigid in the application of the rule, that they are ſeldom accurate; but often include, in the number of harmleſs amuſements, ſuch as, on ſtrict examination, ought not to be admitted. Allowing however that others are more cautious in their deciſion, and exclude from the catalogue pleaſures of doubtful complexion, yet they are too frequently unſuſpicious of the danger attendant on thoſe called innocent pleaſures; and conſider not,

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that what, in a degree may be harmleſs, in exceſs may be guilty; and that thoſe things, which are not in themſelves blameable, become ſo, in a high degree, when preferred to objects of greater eſtimation.

I do not ſuppoſe, that the Apoſtle by the term pleaſure, in the text, meant ſin, which undoubtedly all guilty pleaſures are; but that he uſed it in it's plain and natural ſenſe, which is immediate gratification, or whatever is agreeable to our preſent inclinations. This is the moſt favourable point of view, in which it can be conſidered; yet he condemns ſuch a ſtrong attachment, as gives it a preference to ſuperior conſiderations.

Underſtanding pleaſure therefore in this obvious and natural ſenſe, let us enquire, what is meant by "being lovers of this pleaſure more than lovers of God." We are neither here, nor in any other part of ſcripture, forbidden to enjoy innocent delights, even when they ariſe from the gratification

tification of the ſenſes; ſome preference and peculiar attachment are not prohibited: but we are enjoined moderation, and limited to temperate enjoyment; and muſt not permit our pleaſures to interfere even with the moſt important of our ſecular concerns, much leſs with our duty and love to our Creator. It is of the utmoſt conſequence, with reſpect to our affections, to aſcertain which are ſuperior, and which are ſubordinate, in order to determine their guilt or their innocence. This is plainly diſcernable, whenever two inclinations come in competition, by obſerving which is the governing principle. We may alſo compare their force, though they operate at different times, by remarking the different meaſures of alacrity and joy that accompany their diſtinct exerciſes, and the regret and anxiety, which we experience, when diſappointed of any expected indulgence. We muſt therefore eſtabliſh a kind of competition, between our attachment to pleaſure and our love to the Deity, or at leaſt take ſome pains to examine the reſpective influence of each principle on the heart, be-

fore we can determine, whether we are "lovers of pleaſure more than lovers of God."

The indulgence of a reaſonable gaiety, the chearful enjoyment of the bounties of Providence, and a participation of the ſocial joys of friendſhip and company are by no means criminal; but, with reſpect to time, mode, and expence, they muſt be regulated by due attention to age, rank, and circumſtances; and in no inſtance, infringe on devotion, claſh with actual duties, or be paramount to our care and affection for ſpiritual and eternal objects: for this is more than the utmoſt allowance for youth, fortune, or ſurrounding allurements can reaſonably excuſe. The Chriſtian may partake of every innocent gratification, which the world adminiſters, but muſt not be led captive by temporal delights. He need not refuſe thoſe comfortable accommodations, which he meets, in his journey through life; but he is not to ſeek them with anxiety, nor reſign them with regret. Pleaſure may remove his fatigue, or refreſh his

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ſpirits, but muſt not engage his chief affections, nor engroſs the greater portion of his time. Yet ſuch is it's infatuating nature, that, without continual watchfulneſs, it will inſenſibly ſteal upon the mind; and what was at firſt conſidered merely as agreeable, may by habit acquire ſuch conſequence, as to ſeem neceſſary to our exiſtence.

To know whether we are guilty of this exceſs, we muſt enquire, whether the world ſo far engage our attention, as to draw us off from religious exerciſes, and prevent us from attaining that knowledge, and acquiring that taſte for ſpiritual things, which are evident ſigns of ſpiritual improvement. Are our hopes more elevated by the proſpect of heaven and the promiſes of God, or by the vanities of time and the friendſhip of the world? Do we fear more to incur the wrath of God, and ſuffer eternal excluſion from his preſence; or to loſe our advantages on earth, and ſink in the eſteem of mankind? If we aſk ourſelves faithfully the plain queſtions, in what is our

time principally employed? How have our talents been engaged? What have been, in general, the thoughts of our heart? We cannot be at a loſs to determine the real ſtate of our inclinations and affections.

On ſo cloſe an inſpection, many may ſay, we acknowledge that preſent and inferior enjoyments uſurp unwarrantable dominion over us: but how are we able to diſſolve the charm? How are we to break the chains that bind us to earth; and leave the unfettered ſoul to wing her flight to heaven?

It may tend to check the inordinate purſuit of pleaſure, to reflect on the abſurdity of ſuch a conduct. Will the moſt devoted ſenſualiſt aſſert, that we are to dwell here for ever? Admitting his enjoyment great, his life proſperous, and his ſituation ſecure, can the ſpeedy termination of all temporal delight be totally concealed from his view? Does not the moſt ignorant clearly know, that the flight of a few years muſt put a period to his mortal exiſtence? How fooliſh

and abſurd is it then to baniſh that from our preſent thought, which will ſoon be forced upon our attention? Can we look back with any ſatisfaction on the paſt indulgences of ſenſe, and on the time conſumed in trifling amuſements, when we are called to render an account of the deeds done in the body? When the humble Chriſtian, who has rendered every thing on earth ſubordinate to a preparation for heaven, meets the Almighty, as a father whoſe commands he has obeyed, whoſe providential diſpenſations he has approved, and of whoſe everlaſting love he is ſecure; what a ſtriking contraſt muſt his ſtate form with that of the worldling; who, removed from every object in which his happineſs was placed, is not only deprived of every worldly delight, but filled with the awful apprehenſion of the deciſion of that God, to whom in this world he was a ſtranger, and whom he now beholds as a vindictive judge! Is it any thing ſhort of delirium, to drive that from our preſent thoughts which cannot eventually be avoided; or to hazard, for temporary indulgence, the favour of

our heavenly father, in whoſe preſence is fulneſs of joy, and at whoſe right hand are pleaſures for evermore.

If we ſee the groſs abſurdity of this conduct, it only remains to enquire how we may avoid it. To procure an emancipation from the infatuations of pleaſure and the tyranny of paſſion, we muſt follow the example of holy David; commune with our own hearts, and be ſtill. The duties of private meditation and ſecret prayer, properly performed, will give us ſuch ſteadineſs of diſcernment, that we ſhall no longer be dazzled by the falſe and captivating glare of worldly allurements, but ſhall be impreſſed with a ſenſe of their ſuperficial nature and ſhort duration. We muſt not pay a ſlight but a ſolid attention to religion, not as a matter of decency, but as a matter of the higheſt importance, which conſiſts not merely in a ſet of notions, and an external worſhip, but in teaching the affections ſubmiſſion to the divine will, and in acquiring diſpoſitions replete with conformity to that grand ſyſtem of eternal happi-

happineſs, which infinite wiſdom has framed, and infinite goodneſs communicated.

Self-denial is a neceſſary appendage of chriſtianity. We muſt aim at a conqueſt over ourſelves; conſider the ſtruggle as a neceſſary combat; and never reſt ſatisfied without a complete victory. Not only thoſe flagrant ſins, which produce open ſhame, are incompatible with religion; but any thing, however otherwiſe innocent, that withdraws our mind from our Creator, and impedes our ſpiritual progreſs, muſt be reſigned: for not only "the wicked (ſays the prophet) ſhall be turned into hell," but alſo "all thoſe that forget God." We muſt therefore not only avoid ſcandalous vices, but abſtain from every appearance of evil. We muſt endeavour to acquire a command over ourſelves, by refraining at times, from the enjoyment even of innocent delights; for he, who is not in the habit of denying himſelf ſome things, which are lawful, will not be able to deny himſelf all things that are unlawful. We cannot obſerve, with exact preciſion, the

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line of harmleſs indulgence; and muſt therefore determine to keep on the right ſide, regardleſs of the deceitful invitations of pleaſure.

We muſt reflect on the future advantage and preſent tranquillity of keeping our earthly deſires in ſubjection to the ſuperior faculties of the ſoul: and recollect that genuine religion conſiſts in the predominance of the ſpiritual over the ſenſual part of our compoſition; not in yielding a reluctant obedience to the precepts of morality, but in an entire approbation of the divine commands. We are not only to avoid future miſery, but to be rendered meet for the enjoyment of future felicity; for which deſirable end, the mind, even on earth, muſt be arrayed in the garb of heaven. The delights of immortality will be infinitely ſuperior to thoſe unſatisfying pleaſures which the world affords; but in order to be partakers of endleſs felicity, we muſt acquire a capacity to enjoy it. Our attention muſt be principally directed, during our earthly pilgrimage, to thoſe objects

jects which are to conſtitute our happineſs hereafter; whoſe intrinſic excellence will gradually engage and captivate our deſires, till we view all ſublunary enjoyments in their proper light, as temporary and occaſional refreſhments in the toilſome journey of life; but unworthy the ſerious attention of thoſe, who ſeek a better country, and entertain the rational expectation of endleſs and uncontaminated bliſs.

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SERMON IX.

ISAIAH xxix. 13.

This People draw near me with their Mouth, and with their Lips do honour me, but have removed their Heart far from me.

NOTHING can more fully evince the aſtoniſhing depravity of human nature than the hiſtory of the Jews; who, with every inducement to obedience, diſcovered a conſtant and inveterate propenſity to rebellion againſt their Maker.

Yet the hiſtory of this ſmall and peculiar people, while it diſplays, in many lamentable inſtances, want of faith and diſregard to morality, is a complete epitome of the general hiſtory of mankind: the ſame

ſame reſiſtance of grace, which fatally marked their character, and juſtly entitled them to the epithet of ſtiff-necked, has ever been prevalent in the human heart; and, in every age of the church, has oppoſed the progreſs of true religion.

When God, by a wonderful diſplay of his power, either in the accompliſhment of prophecy or the exhibition of miracle, has ſtruck mankind with amazement; born down their ſtrongeſt prejudices, and eſtabliſhed on the cleareſt evidence the principles of religion; then indeed they have for a time embraced the truths thus awfully announced, and performed the divine ordinances for a ſeaſon with zeal and ſincerity. But how ſoon was their religious ardour abated! How ſoon did they return to ſinful practices, and indulge erroneous opinions!

Notwithſtanding the moſt inconteſtible proofs of divine power, and the moſt alarming denunciations of divine vengeance, they not only neglected to liſten to the ſacred warn-

warnings, but have often acted in direct oppoſition to the commands of that ſupreme and beneficent God, who ſelected them from the ſurrounding nations.

Flagrant as this obſtinacy and rebellion againſt the will of the Moſt High muſt appear, there is a conduct which is yet more dangerous becauſe leſs ſuſpected; and it's conſequences are more fatal, as they not only corrupt the heart, but alſo becloud the underſtanding. And this is the ſin againſt which God, by his prophet, remonſtrates in the text; ſubſtituting a vain form of religion for the genuine ſpirit of devotion; drawing near to the Almighty with our lips, when our hearts are far from him. Againſt this heinous crime the prophets and apoſtles direct their moſt ſevere reproofs and pathetic obſervations; and our Lord himſelf, not only pointedly condemns the practice, but ſhews it's imminent danger, by declaring, that even harlots and publicans ſhall enter into the kingdom of heaven before formaliſts and hypocrites.

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An open and prophane ſinner, when wearied with the vanities of the world, or forcibly impreſſed by ſome alarming ſtroke of Providence, may have his conſcience awakened to reflection on the evil of his conduct; may ſee the dreadful danger of his ſituation, and be alarmed by the terrors of future puniſhment: he then will be naturally led to acknowledge his offences, and have nothing to impede his true repentance. But the formal profeſſor, who imagines he has already fulfilled his duty, by avoiding ſhameful vices and performing religious ceremonies, is not affected by the awful threatnings which terrify the open ſinner. Reſting in a falſe hope, he is leſs anxious to ſeek the true. His partial compliance with ſome duties, prevents him from frankly acknowledging himſelf an unworthy offender, or earneſtly endeavouring at a thorough reformation.

Having ſhewn the importance and neceſſity of this diſtinction between an outward compliance with forms, and the religion that takes poſſeſſion of the heart, I pro-

proceed to enlarge on the peculiar qualities of each character, in order that we may ſtrictly examine our hearts, and not ſtop ſhort of that ſincere religious ſervice, which alone can be acceptable in the ſight of our Creator.

The prophet, by thoſe whom he deſcribes as drawing near to God with their mouth, and honouring him with their lips, intends thoſe who have acknowledged the neceſſity of religion, and complied with external inſtitutions, but are ſtrangers to a change of heart, and adopt not, in their ſecret conduct, that purity which God requires.

That it is poſſible to perform the whole round of ceremonial obſervances, without obtaining the approbation of the ſupreme; nay, that they may be performed in ſuch a manner as to render us obnoxious to his diſpleaſure, is evident, not only from the text, but from many ſimilar paſſages of ſcripture. "Your new moons and your ſabbaths my ſoul hateth," is the declaration

tion of the Almighty: and yet they were expreſsly of divine appointment. The ſacrifices in the Old Teſtament were inſtituted by particular command; yet, when they were abuſed, and offered from a wrong motive, he aſks, "Who hath required them at your hand?" meaning, who hath required them, in the manner in which they are now performed? Who hath appointed them as an effectual ſacrifice for ſin; as a ceremonial act, that ſhould cleanſe the heart, by the operation of the hands; or as a ſervice which will, of itſelf, entitle the performer to forgiveneſs and favour in the ſight of God? For in that ſenſe they were then underſtood by the backſliding Iſraelites; who would not otherwiſe have received ſo ſevere a rebuke.

God had appointed them as uſeful, though not eſſential means of grace. Their ſacrifices, while conſidered as types of the complete offering to be made, in the fullneſs of time, for ſinners, in the perſon of our Saviour, were not only well-pleaſing to the Almighty, but alſo conducive to the ſpiri-

tual comfort and improvement of man. While the choſen people uſed them to keep in mind the neceſſity of a better righteouſneſs than their own, while thus reminded of their natural depravity, they acquired and cultivated the grace of God, and were inſpired with gratitude for the pardon and reconciliation which the oblations, as types of the Meſſiah, forcibly exhibited; theſe performances received, from the prophets, encouragement and commendation; but when they became inſtrumental in producing ſpiritual pride, and were ſubſtituted in the place of morality and piety, this groſs perverſion was ſharply reprehended, and the rites themſelves apparently diſcountenanced by the expreſſion, "I will have mercy and not ſacrifice." When the eternal obligations of juſtice and charity were diſregarded; when obedience in ceremonial inſtitutions was conſidered as a diſpenſation for the neglect of morality; then not only the inſufficiency of the eſtabliſhed ritual, but even its danger was expreſsly declared, and pointedly inforced.

What ſacrifices and ſolemn feſtivals were to the Jews, prayers and ſacraments are to us; means appointed by the Almighty, for teſtifying and ſtrengthening our faith; channels for communicating divine mercy and protection; helps to the infirmities of our nature; which may encreaſe our graces and enliven our obedience. But when we perform them as duties meritorious in themſelves, and reſt in the external ſervice, they will ſubject us to the ſame ſevere reproaches, and involve us in the ſame fatal conſequences which were denounced by the prophet againſt the outward court-worſhippers of his day.

And, that this is a ſituation not only poſſible, but common, we have reaſon to apprehend; for there is nothing in the depravity of our nature ſo repugnant to the external profeſſion of religion, as there is to its genuine and internal operation. Nay, ſome of the principles of religion may be conſidered as natural to man. The greatneſs and goodneſs of God are evident to all,

and demand a reverence which they are neither able nor deſirous to refuſe.

In the giddineſs of youth, or the pride of proſperity, when misfortunes have not yet diſcovered the vanity of the world, and the proſpect of death is at too great a diſtance to diſturb the unthinking mind, ſome indeed appear to poſſeſs no ſenſe of religion: but in general the diſappointments of human expectation, the ſhortneſs of life, and our own involuntary ſenſations, are ſufficient to prove the neceſſity of ſome preparation for the awful hour of departure, and incline us to ſome ſort of worſhip.

We feel not therefore much repugnance at proſtrating the body before the Almighty, ſeeking his help in caſes of extreme neceſſity, or yielding him general acknowledgments for the bounties of his providence: but the difficulty lies in practiſing the holineſs which he requires; in reſiſting the inclinations to evil, which are inconſiſtent with the purity of religion; and in yielding a ſincere and entire obedi-

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ence to his will. To make ſome alteration in the outward conduct, and keep within the pale of decency, may procure us among men the character of religious, but will not obtain the approbation of God. The Phariſees (than whom none were more ſeverely reprehended by our Lord) were eſteemed by the world for the regularity of their external devotion, and venerated for the apparent ſanctity of their manners, yet were deſtitute of real religion, and therefore rejected by him who penetrates the motives of the heart, and from whom no ſecrets are hid. But it may be obſerved, that while our Saviour rebukes the Phariſees for neglecting the vital duties of religion, though ſcrupulouſly exact in the performance of rites and ceremonies, he does not adviſe to lay them wholly aſide as uſeleſs, but expreſsly ſays, "Theſe (meaning the great obligations of faith in God and mercy to man) ye ſhould have done, and not have left the others (meaning rites and ceremonies) undone."

If therefore the favour of God, and not the praiſe of men, be our object; if we have in view the ſalvation of the ſoul, and not merely the repoſe of conſcience, we muſt have ſomething more than a ſtrict and regular outward profeſſion. God is a ſpirit, and muſt be worſhipped in ſpirit and in truth. We muſt ſeek a communication with him in private, as well as call upon him in his public ordinances. No public profeſſion, however regular, will compenſate for the omiſſion of private devotion. Divine ordinances and eſtabliſhed forms of worſhip were not meant to raiſe a temporary flame of devotion, which ſhould expire with the ſervice, and leave the heart to return to common avocations cold and inanimate; but they were inſtituted to implant in us ſuch a ſenſe of religion, as ſhould remain and operate when we return into the world, and are occupied in ſecular duties.

To enable us to judge whether we poſſeſs this real religion of the heart, it will be

be uſeful to enquire, with what views we approach the houſe of God; how and with what ſpirit we perform the ſervices which he hath ordained; and what are their effects upon our life and conduct. Do we come to this ſacred place, under a ſtrong ſenſe of our own unworthineſs; with a real intention to confeſs our ſin, and earneſtly plead for mercy at the throne of God? Do we reflect that we have a ſolemn duty to perform, an important end to obtain? Are we ſo fully convinced of our entire dependence on the author of our exiſtence, as to feel the neceſſity of coming conſtantly to him, as to the giver of every temporal and ſpiritual bleſſing? Have we ſuch a ſenſe of his unſpeakable goodneſs, ſuch a value for his ineſtimable gifts, and ſuch animated gratitude to the all-bountiful Donor, as to be ardently anxious to pay our public praiſe, and join in the thankſgivings of his aſſembled people? Have we that high and juſt eſtimation of divine ſervice, which incites us to prepare with alacrity for its performance, and not ſuffer any trifling obſtacle to deprive us of the happy occaſion

of paying our vows before him? And if any unforeſeen circumſtance unavoidably prevents our attendance on divine worſhip, do we conſider the omiſſion as a ſenſible loſs? When engaged in the reſponſes, do we adopt as our own the words which we utter with our lips? Do we endeavour to check our wandering thoughts, and fix them on the ſacred exerciſes in which we are engaged? Do we return from the church of Chriſt under a ſtrong ſenſe, that to be his diſciples, we muſt not be conformed to this world, but transformed in the image of our mind? And do we frequently retire to meditate how we ſhall reduce to practice the precepts of holy inſtruction we have imbibed? Are we inſpired with new reſolutions of obedience to the divine will; and determined on earneſtly endeavouring to preſerve ourſelves from ſin, and even to avoid temptation? An honeſt anſwer to theſe enquiries will enable us to judge, whether we have really ſurrendered the
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our ſtrength; or whether we re-
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minal Chriſtians, calling upon God only with the mouth, and honouring him merely with the lips.

Be it alſo our care to act, in our commerce with mankind, in a manner ſuitable to our religious profeſſion, and becoming the chriſtian character. A decent deportment may indeed be preſerved, while the heart is a ſtranger to vital holineſs; but real piety can never exiſt, where exemplary behaviour is wanting. Our religion muſt not reſemble a garment, to be put on in the houſe of God, and thrown off at our departure from his holy temple. If we would pleaſe God, we muſt not diſgrace, by our inconſiſtency, the ſacred engagements into which we have ſolemnly entered. Our actions muſt be uniformly directed to the glory of God, and the welfare of our fellow-creatures; and we muſt ſeek occaſions of promoting, to the utmoſt of our power, the reformation of the wicked, and the improvement of the well-inclined; which will reciprocally contribute

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to our own; for without earneſtly labouring to get forward, we ſhall actually go backward, and through our inattention loſe thoſe attainments in holineſs at which we may have happily arrived.

A frequent examination of the heart is neceſſary, to guard againſt ſelf-deception; ſince nothing is more eaſy than to flatter ourſelves with exalted ideas of our own proficiency. Theſe high notions ſhould always be ſuſpected; humility is the diſtinguiſhing ornament of the Chriſtian; the diſpoſition peculiarly neceſſary for his acceptance at the throne of grace, and which he retains through the whole progreſs of the divine life. A little reflection will convince us, that we have nothing but what we have received, and muſt be conſcious that our beſt performances are tinctured with imperfection, and that our greateſt improvements have not correſponded with our opportunities. We muſt therefore be earneſt in applying for divine aſſiſtance for our ſupport in the way of holineſs; and

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truſt in the ſame Almighty Being, who reſcued us from ſin and miſery, for his preſervation during our earthly pilgrimage, and for admiſſion through the all-ſufficient merits of his Redeemer, to a ſtate of perfect purity, and conſummate happineſs.

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SERMON X.

PROV. xxix. 25.

The Fear of Man bringeth a Snare.

THE true end of religion is, not to eradicate our paſſions, but to regulate them; not totally to deſtroy our appetites and inclinations, but to turn them into proper channels: there is not a feeling natural to our frame, nor a paſſion reſident in the ſoul, but, if duly reſtrained, and properly regulated, would promote our happineſs. The grand evils to be avoided are their miſapplication and exceſs. An upright conduct depends on our moving in that line of rectitude, which conſtitutes the perfection of our nature; but from that line we have greatly deviated: and the precepts

cepts of the Goſpel were given, and are well calculated to reſtore us from thoſe deviations, to which, by the effects of the fall, we are univerſally prone.

We have not, as ſinners, loſt our old, or acquired any new faculties; but our powers have been abuſed, and our talents miſemployed; the dominion of reaſon has been overthrown, and the affections of the mind have acquired a wrong bias; falſe and pernicious habits of thinking and acting have been eſtabliſhed, which often prevent us from diſcerning our true ſtate, and at all times are difficulties in the way of our recovery.

We ſhould therefore never yield to any propenſity, before we have well examined its tendency; and, in the exerciſe of every paſſion, we ſhould conſider the juſt medium in which the perfection of virtue is placed.

A proud, haughty, and overbearing ſpirit, that plumes itſelf in an imagined ſuperiority

riority of rank or excellence, and, with affected diſtance, looks down on the ſons of ignorance and poverty, is a ſpirit truly deſpicable, and anti-chriſtian; againſt which we are frequently and forcibly admoniſhed in the ſacred writings.

But there is a mode of conduct ariſing from falſe motives, and inconſiſtent with true dignity of mind, which borders on the oppoſite and equally dangerous extreme; a mean ſubmiſſion to every opinion; an abject compliance with every requiſition; an implicit and improper deference to our fellow-mortals: this is that "fear of man which bringeth a ſnare;" againſt which therefore, as a dangerous error, Solomon warns us. Yet while we behold this ſervile diſpoſition as diſgraceful to our nature, and injurious to our true intereſt, we are not to conſider ourſelves independent of ſociety, or exempt from controul: we are commanded to ſubmit to magiſtrates, to reverence parents, to reſpect mankind.

As it is eſſential to the chriſtian character, that we ſhould obſerve due ſubmiſſion to all proper authority, and yet avoid the abject ſervility reprobated in the text, I ſhall endeavour to diſtinguiſh them from each other, and attempt to aſcertain their limits, by examining the ſources from whence they ſeverally proceed; and then to ſhew the pernicious effects of that unmanly, unwarrantable, and anti-chriſtian dread of our fellow-mortals, againſt which the paſſage before us is directly pointed.

A deference to age, ability, kindred and office, is founded on the divine commands: we are injoined, in many paſſages of ſcripture, to venerate the aged, to liſten to the wiſe, and to obey parents and magiſtrates, provided their mandates are conſiſtent with the law of God. When their requiſitions enforce thoſe moral precepts, dictated by conſcience, and confirmed by revelation, we ought not to heſitate in our compliance, ſince in theſe caſes the Chriſtian only purſues the ſame end which he has in view, independently of any human obligation. It

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is alſo reaſonable, that a power be inveſted in the rulers of a nation, to adapt their legiſlative meaſures to the temporal circumſtances of their conſtituents, for which the ſacred writings have made no proviſion. They may therefore command ſome things, which are not expreſsly injoined in ſcripture, and prohibit others, which are not there expreſsly forbidden. In theſe caſes obedience is a duty, ſince we are exhorted by the apoſtle to "ſubmit to the ordinances of man for God's ſake:" this however muſt be underſtood to extend ſo far only as they are not contrary to the precepts of religion; ſhould that ever happen, it is our duty to refuſe compliance; according to the words of St. Peter, addreſſed to the Jewiſh magiſtrates, "We ought to obey God rather than men."

The peace and good order of ſociety require, that we ſhould ſubmit to thoſe who are appointed by Providence guardians of public ſafety, and protectors of a nation; yet our ſubmiſſion ſhould be voluntary, and not the effect of fear: the mind impreſſed with

with holy awe, by contemplating the power and perfection of Deity, will feel no terror from the conſideration of thoſe penalties, which may be inflicted by the rage or tyranny of men, who are only inſtruments in the hand of the Almighty, and can do nothing without his permiſſion; who can neither ſecure us from his wrath, nor deprive us of his protection.

Reverence to parents is alſo an important part of duty, injoined in the decalogue, and dictated by nature, even in its preſent corrupt ſtate; and we ſhould, when adults, preſerve this veneration, not only unimpaired by time, but improved by reaſon, and ſtrengthened by religion. We ſhould obſerve towards our parents a reſpectful deportment, and ſolace, by filial affection, the infirmities of age: we ſhould not view their failings with ſeverity, but diſcover in our conduct a ſenſe of the obligations under which they have laid us, and which we can never fully diſcharge.

Such inſtances of reſpect, attention, and ſubmiſſion, naturally proceed from a ſenſe of our duty to God, a wiſh to promote order, and a principle of natural affection: but that fear of man, which is of a pernicious kind, ariſes from motives of a very different deſcription. We are apt to be dazzled with the ſplendor of rank, and to be impreſſed with dread of a fellow-creature, becauſe decorated in the gaudy trappings of wealth and grandeur. This operation on the mind is ſo mechanical, that where there is no probability of any profit or diſadvantage, we yet are inclined to pay homage to the opulent; as if riches conferred real merit, and included the idea of every excellent quality.

But this propenſity is greatly ſtrengthened, when there is a proſpect of gaining by the favour of the wealthy, or of ſuffering by their diſpleaſure: our attachment to worldly objects leads us to ſeek the friendſhip and ſhun the enmity of thoſe, who are capable of affecting our temporal intereſt,

intereſt, and to neglect the deſerving, whoſe indigence prevents the operation of their benevolent wiſhes.

Inattention to the omnipotence of God is alſo a great ſource of this miſtaken conduct: for even the ſordid principle of ſelf-intereſt, if rationally directed, muſt lead us to ſeek protection, where it can be moſt effectually afforded; and to avoid offending him, who is able to inflict the ſevereſt puniſhment; but, while virtue is regular and conſiſtent, vice counteracts its own ends, and in practice contradicts its own principles.

Whoever attends to thoſe inſtances of Divine Providence, which are within the circle of his obſervation, will find that temporal proſperity is not always obtained by courting the favour of the great; our ſolicitations may be in vain, or our patrons may ſuddenly ſink in diſgrace and indigence, and involve us in their ruin; but, had they the permanent diſpoſal of every worldly advantage, we ſhould ſtill act on improper

principles, in paying that homage to men which is due to our Creator, and ſuffering any other motive to influence our conduct, than obedience to the unerring commands of Deity.

Our fear of man often ariſes from a fondneſs of applauſe and a dread of cenſure. Thoſe, who cannot raiſe us by their power, may yet recommend us by their praiſe; and thoſe who cannot immediately injure our circumſtances, may remotely affect them by depreciating our character. Theſe conſiderations too often induce us to catch at momentary plaudits, inſtead of endeavouring to deſerve laſting eſteem: we are held in bondage by the opinion of others, and feel ourſelves elevated or depreſſed, as the wavering fancy, or fluctuating paſſions of mankind approve, or condemn our conduct.

But the permanent baſis of a good character muſt be internal: if we maintain a conſcience void of offence, a good name may be valued as a pleaſing addition; yet

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ſhould it be withheld, its abſence will not deſtroy our peace; we ſhall appeal from the erring verdict of prejudice, to the teſtimony of our faithful monitor, who will witneſs to the equity and integrity of our conduct.

Should we make the plaudit of men neceſſary to our peace, we ſhall feel an abject dread of their cenſure, and thus become wretchedly dependent on the opinion of others, and ſubject to the improper fear mentioned in the text; which, from whatever cauſe it may ariſe, is always attended with "a ſnare."

Solomon does not affirm, that it conſtantly produces evil, or plunges us into groſs immorality, and extreme miſery; for it may at times ſupply the place of better motives, and be apparently beneficial in its effects; but we have erected a falſe ſtandard for our conduct. When thoſe whom we fear happen to be the wiſe and good, we may act well in conformity to their inclinations, and thus externally appear in the

right; yet this is merely accidental, as the principle of fear would lead us to follow its objects, if they took a contrary direction.

The man, who at all times dreads the cenſure, and deſires the applauſe of thoſe with whom he is connected, will be apt to ſuppreſs, or diſguiſe his real ſentiments, even in eſſential particulars, whenever he is conſcious they will meet with an unfavourable reception. Admitting his religious opinions to be ever ſo rationally and ſcripturally founded, in one company, he will be aſhamed at believing ſo little, and in another bluſh for believing ſo much. In the aſſemblies of enthuſiaſts, he will be induced to act the hypocrite, and affect a degree of ſanctity foreign to his heart; in the preſence of the ſcoffer and the infidel, he will pretend to no religion, leſt he ſhould incur the imputation of folly, and be ridiculed for his weakneſs and credulity. By thus endeavouring to accommodate himſelf to all, his principles will become unſettled, and no longer be capable of regulating his conduct, or determining his actions; he

will be in that ſtate, which the apoſtle at once deſcribes and laments, "like a wave of the ſea," which yielding to every gale of wind, is carried to and fro in perpetual agitation.

If the fear of man prevails, we ſhall behold the vices of the wicked at firſt in ſilence, till, by reſtraining our honeſt feelings, we loſe the ſenſe of their horror, and by degrees applaud and imitate the worſt examples. Any principles of virtue or religion, formerly reſident in our minds, will, by lying dormant and inactive, be obliterated, and give place to prevalent folly and infidelity.

The motives to an uniform and upright conduct, muſt be ſuperior to every ſordid idea, and independent of the world. If we place ourſelves under the direction of the Almighty, and abide by the rule of his word, it will preſerve us in perfect peace; but we muſt not turn to the right hand nor the left. Having a ſurer guide, we muſt not meanly invite the approbation, nor ſervilely

vilely tremble at the frown of fallible mortals like ourſelves; for the fear of man, which withdraws our eye from the pattern of perfection, and ſets up another ſtandard for our conduct, deſtroys the ſimplicity which we are commanded to preſerve, and "bringeth a ſnare," which may beguile us of our peace, and endanger our ſalvation.

To avoid which, we ſhould reflect, that there is an immutable rule of right and wrong, with which we are not ſuffered to ſport; that truth is an eternal principle, unſuſceptible of alteration, which we are neither permitted to deny nor diſguiſe; for when our Lord ſays, "thoſe that deny me before men, will I deny in the day of judgment," he does not only mean his name and perſon, but alſo the moral truths which he hath delivered. If we conceal or violate thoſe ſacred precepts through the fear of man, we ſhall fall under the condemnation pronounced by the prophet; "Woe unto them that call good evil, and evil good; that call darkneſs light, and light darkneſs."

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And, while we thus expoſe ourſelves to divine wrath, what deſirable purpoſe can we have in view as an adequate compenſation? What can man, independent of God, procure for us? In labouring, as a chief good, after any thing a fellow-mortal can beſtow, we are indeed "giving our bread for that which ſatisfieth not, and ſpending our ſtrength for that which will not profit." If the fear of man is the prevalent principle, we muſt ſhift our ground in compliance with the fluctuation of opinions: we muſt wear a maſk, and run the conſtant hazard of detection: we ſhall often be deſpiſed, when we expect to be applauded: and when, by the moſt abject conduct, and ſubmiſſive diſpoſition, we imagine we have gained our point, ſome unforeſeen accident may diſcover our duplicity, and expoſe us to general contempt and deteſtation.

If we plead, that our intereſt will be affected, by acting in full conformity to the dictates of our conſcience, we ſhould remember, that we "cannot ſerve God and Mammon;" that worldly intereſt is to be ſacrificed,

ſacrificed, when it comes in competition with ſacred duty. Nor is it a hard requiſition, when we are enjoined to deſpiſe the fear of man, and forego our temporal advantage, in order to preſerve our integrity; for we are then only called to reſign a leſs for a greater good, a carnal for a ſpiritual, a temporal for an eternal. God is not "an hard maſter:" for whoſoever, in obedience to his commands, has given up any advantage, ſhall receive ten fold. A deſire of reputation is innocent, and a wiſh to deſerve praiſe is rational, but neither operating rationally, will render the Chriſtian a ſlave to the fear of man, ſince a fellow-mortal can neither eventually prevent that approbation which he withholds, nor make permanent the fame which he beſtows.

A real good name is no more than the public acknowledgment of our virtue; if this be withheld, through the malice of enemies, or the intervention of unfavourable circumſtances, the virtue ſtill exiſts; inſpires conſcious dignity, and preſerves internal peace. It is a ſubſtance which remains

mains ſolid and entire, though, in the abſence of the ſun, it caſts no ſhadow; while a reputation not founded on virtue is a bubble, that the firſt adverſe gale may burſt, rendering what was ſplendid and engaging diſſipated air, that cannot be perceived; or an unſightly drop that affixes a ſtain.

The man who wiſhes for that peace, which the world can neither communicate nor deſtroy, muſt be, in a degree, inſenſible of their praiſe, and even of their cenſure; it is impoſſible to ſuppreſs groundleſs rumours, or ſilence malicious tongues, but to fortify the mind againſt theſe evils is neceſſary and practicable. If we have the fear of God impreſſed on our hearts, it will deliver us from the fear of man, and ſecure us from every ſnare: we ſhall not then depend for happineſs on the ſmiles of friends, or find our peace annoyed by the attacks of enemies. If Chriſt be formed in the ſoul, no regard to worldly reputation will ſubvert our integrity, or deſtroy the compoſure of our tempers; we ſhall imitate that patient fortitude, with which the

Redeemer

Redeemer of mankind bore the aſperſions caſt on his character, and the indignities offered to his perſon. Since he ſuſtained inexpreſſible ſufferings for our ſalvation, which only the divine nature in union with humanity could have enabled him to ſupport, let us not repine, if we ſhould be called to experience a ſmall portion of affliction in the ſervice of him, who hath ſuffered ſo much for us. Let no dread of human power, or deſire of human approbation, induce us to forſake the path of holineſs in which our bleſſed Saviour has led the way, ſince all our endeavours may not ſucceed in obtaining the favour of capricious man, but will tend to excite the diſpleaſure of a holy God, whoſe vengeance we cannot ſhun, whoſe omniſcience we cannot deceive, and who is the ſupreme object of profound awe and ſacred veneration.

SERMON XI.

1 Cor. xiii. 9.

For we know in Part, and we propheſy in Part.

THE imperfection of human reaſon is never ſo apparent, as when it is employed in the inveſtigation of ſpiritual ſubjects: for though the pureſt principles have inſtituted an earneſt and laborious inquiry; though the beſt means have been adopted, and the nobleſt faculties exerted in the ſearch, yet an impenetrable veil conceals the affairs of futurity. When the reflective mind turns its attention to the other world, it is unable to pierce far, even when aſſiſted by the keeneſt penetration. A profound obſcurity checks its progreſs, and convinces us, that the ſubject is of too great magnitude to be compre-

comprehended by our preſent limited powers. Yet, to find our ardent efforts after information repreſſed, and all beyond the preſent moment involved in darkneſs, torments the inquiſitive with diſappointment, and agitates the ſerious with anxiety; and againſt this, as againſt every other trial, none but the ſincere Chriſtian is completely fortified.

Having a firm faith in the wiſdom and goodneſs of God, he believes, that the meaſure of knowledge communicated, though not adequate to his deſires, is beſt ſuited to his earthly ſtation, and beſt accommodated to his happineſs. His deſpair at knowing ſo little, is prevented by the joyful hope, that a complete diſcovery will ſoon take place; he is therefore perfectly contented, in this ſhade of mortality, to ſee, as the Apoſtle expreſſes it, "through a glaſs darkly," convinced that hereafter his view will be clear and comprehenſive.

But he who is deſtitute of faith, and inattentive to the word of God, is ſoon diſſatisfied with the portion of information afforded;

forded; and, becauſe he is not gratified with a full diſcovery of eternal objects, abandons the purſuit, and gives himſelf wholly up to ignorance and ſenſuality. Others, following a blind zeal, and indulging an enthuſiaſtic fancy, are led to imagine, and even bold to declare, that the ſpiritual world is as clearly unfolded to their views as the natural; and not only confidently aſſert their abſolute certainty of their own ſalvation, but alſo decidedly pronounce, concerning the rejection of others. Thus while the former reject the helps to ſpiritual improvement, and turn with ſullen diſguſt from the light that is offered them, the latter are miſled by the deluſions of their own imagination, and neglect the plain and neceſſary part of religion.

The repreſentation of the Apoſtle is calculated at once to check preſumption and prevent deſpair: for, though he declares, that a clear and diſtinct view of the nature and glories of a future ſtate will never be enjoyed in this, yet he does not confign us to the dominion of ignorance, but allows

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that we may poſſeſs a knowledge of ſpiritual things, which, however, during our reſidence on earth, will not be complete, but only in part.

It appears by divine revelation, and the ſtructure of the univerſe, that our all-wiſe Creator has placed man in a ſtate of progreſſion, and that he will communicate to him the nature and end of his deſigns, by degrees exactly accommodated to his ſtate of improvement; that much of this diſcovery is reſerved, till, by our great change, we ſhall be better fitted to receive it; but that, even here, our knowledge, though it can never attain to perfection, may be continually advancing. The Apoſtle, therefore, by this true repreſentation of things, by warning us that there are limits to the human underſtanding, and that ſome truths, after our utmoſt ſearch, will remain concealed, does not mean to prevent, but only to regulate our enquiries, and to inform us, that the juſt line of chriſtian conduct is, to avail ourſelves of all the information concerning the will of God, and our own happineſs,

pineſs, which he hath communicated; but patiently to wait for the diſcovery of thoſe myſteries, which, at preſent, we may conclude are unneceſſary to be known, by being inveloped in impenetrable darkneſs.

To prevent our idly reſting in ignorance, or anxiouſly attempting impoſſibilities, it will be highly uſeful to examine, what branches of knowledge are neceſſary and attainable; what is the part of divine ſcience that we can or ought to know; and what muſt be left for the exerciſe of our refined faculties in a purer ſtate of exiſtence.

And firſt, a knowledge of ourſelves is both eſſential and attainable: till this is acquired, it is impoſſible that we can apply our faculties to their proper uſe, fulfil the duties we are required to perform, or move in that direction which leads to our true felicity. This information therefore is clearly exhibited in ſcripture, is by the inſpired writers kept in conſtant view, and in the ſacred oracles ſo fully diſcovered, that nothing but culpable inattention to the call

of God in his word, and to the voice of conſcience in our own boſoms, can prevent our acquiſition of this neceſſary and uſeful knowledge.

When the great contemplate an illuſtrious line of anceſtors to ſwell their pride, or maintain an idle diſtinction among men, they degrade their reaſon, and ſquander their time in vanity; but when we ſearch farther into antiquity, and minutely examine the hiſtory of our firſt parents, in order to gain an intimate knowledge of ourſelves, the enquiry is wiſe, and the reſult profitable. When we find that the common anceſtor of all was under a curſe, as well with reſpect to his poſterity as himſelf, we receive an eſſential though not a flattering article of information; and learn to account for that viſible and lamentable depravity, which pervades the progeny of apoſtate man. Our Maker, by the mouth of prophets and apoſtles, and alſo our bleſſed Saviour, conſtantly addreſſes us as fallen creatures; and without we acknowledge the character, and perceive our corruption,

we

we can neither underſtand their meſſages, nor profit by their exhortations.

This truth, however unpleaſing, is clearly and unequivocally revealed in the ſacred records; and we have an indubitable teſtimony within ourſelves, corroborating external evidence. Whoever ſubmits the motions of his mind to the examination of reaſon, may eaſily diſcern the evil bias of his paſſions, and the impurity of his deſires; and muſt conclude, that, were he to remain in his natural ſtate, he would be unfit for the preſence of God, and unqualified for the participation of happineſs.

Not only the knowledge of the fall, but alſo the knowledge of our recovery, forms an important part of that information which is clearly revealed. The offers of mercy are not enwrapt in myſtery, but communicated in the plaineſt and moſt intelligible terms. We are informed, that the enormity of our guilt will be no bar to repentance: the gracious invitations of the Goſpel are univerſally addreſſed to ſinners, and

the terms of their acceptance unreſervedly made known: the love of the Father in ſending his Son, and the nature of his miſſion, are obvious and indiſputable: the operations of faith, in producing purity of life, and generating an univerſal principle of charity, are diſtinctly marked; and nothing omitted that is eſſential to direct our practice, or facilitate our progreſs in the divine life.

Though the principles of our religion, in the eſſential doctrines of the ſinfulneſs of man, the merit of a Saviour, and the nature of our acceptance with God, are clear and intelligible to every ſincere inquirer, yet a wonderful ſtock of knowledge is ſtill in ſtore for thoſe, who compare the prophecies with their fulfilment, and the types of the Meſſiah with his divine perſon; and obſerve the effects of embracing or rejecting the offers of mercy, as they are diſtinctly recorded in the annals of the choſen people, and the hiſtorical accounts of other remarkable characters, tranſmitted in ſacred writ. Every accompliſhment of

promiſe

promiſe and infliction of puniſhment will have a tendency to enlarge the mind, and confirm the faith of the attentive obſerver. In proportion as, by frequent contemplations, we draw near to thoſe ſpiritual objects that are practical and uſeful, we ſhall find them unfolded to our view. A familiar acquaintance with our bible, will remove our anxiety and enliven our hope; but though all that is uſeful is clearly revealed, ſecret things belong to God.

The wiſdom and goodneſs of our Creator may be diſtinctly and evidently diſcerned, in the general ſtructure of the univerſe: yet there are parts, whoſe conſiſtency with the whole does not appear; and the utility of which we are not able to diſcover: but we reaſonably conclude, that they are neceſſary parts of that grand ſcheme which is too extenſive for human comprehenſion.

So, in the word of God, though the leading truths are not only clearly revealed, but inconteſtibly proved, though the line that ſhould mark our conduct, is plainly

deſcribed, yet there are truths leſs eſſential, which are only declared on the divine authority, and left as exerciſes of our faith. The word of God is juſtly entitled by David a light to our feet, and a lanthorn to our paths; and we may truſt to its infallible direction, for the removal of every obſtacle that impedes our progreſs; yet we know but in part; for, with reſpect to doctrines not immediately connected with our practice, they muſt remain the objects of our faith; and will not be minutely explained to gratify our curioſity. The wiſdom and intereſt of man therefore conſiſt in diligently and conſtantly labouring to underſtand all that God has revealed; and reverently ſtopping ſhort, where the infinite nature of an object, or the want of divine direction, forbids his progreſs.

The ample portion of knowledge which is attainable, ſhould inſpire diligence, and the awful obſcurity that involves the reſt, ſhould teach us humility. We ſhould neither be negligent, where we have a clue to direct our purſuit, nor preſumptuous in determining,

termining, where we have no ground from ſcripture to ſupport us. To illuſtrate this more clearly, I will mention a particular enquiry in which we may proceed with ſafety, and a point where we ſhould prudently ſtop.

We have, in the directions given us by our Saviour, for our practice in this life, an inexhauſtible treaſure of ſpiritual information. He defined every duty by accurate reaſoning, and illuſtrated it by pertinent example: every incident of his life, attentively conſidered, conveys an uſeful moral; the erroneous maxims of the world are detected, and the maſk of hypocriſy ſtript from the falſe profeſſor: the great advantages of an humble and ſimple conduct are pointed out, and leſſons afforded, for our direction, in the various conjunctures of life; the true ſources of happineſs are opened to our view, and the conſequences of every ſpecies of action unfolded for our inſpection. This information we cannot too accurately underſtand: here we may innocently and uſefully exert our whole

powers of inveſtigation; here every addition to our knowledge will be attended with immediate benefit; here, as our views grow clearer, our conduct will be more regular, our principles of action more refined, and our tempers more ſanctified; the more we imbibe of the ſacred ſtream of his unparalleled inſtruction, the better ſhall we be prepared for the enjoyment of true felicity.

But if we turn our attention from his doctrine to the infinity of his perſon, we have only ſome grand and leading particulars to direct our faith. Preciſion is not here ſo neceſſary as in rules of practice; nor is it attainable, ſince it is impoſſible that we ſhould accurately define thoſe ſubjects which are beyond the reach of human reaſon. We ſhould therefore adopt his own expreſſions, rather than indulge ſpeculative reaſoning. For the proof of his authority he himſelf appeals to his works; and indeed, the miracles which he performed, evinced, that the whole natural and ſpiritual world were ſubmitted to his government. The wonders that he wrought manifeſted

niſeſted his power, and the benevolent nature of his Goſpel proved him poſſeſt of infinite goodneſs: but beyond theſe proofs we cannot go. Therefore, ſince he declares, that he and the Father are one, we ſhould acknowledge his divinity, and worſhip him accordingly; but we muſt not expect that his union with the Father can be clear to the apprehenſion of a finite being. Here indeed we know but in part; and though the Apoſtle taught his churches all that was neceſſary, yet here even he propheſied but in part. Humility therefore ſhould teach us not to contend with our fellow-chriſtians for preciſe and determinate opinions, which are only in part revealed.

So, to mention another inſtance; when we enquire into the nature of true repentance, and examine the ſacred ſcriptures, and our own hearts, in order to determine how far we are deficient in the faith and practice of a Chriſtian, our enquiries are proper, and tend to utility; in this knowledge we may conſtantly advance, ſince we

are furniſhed with abundant helps for its proſecution. But if we are anxious about the exact nature of our future exiſtence, the reward we ſhall receive, or the employments in which we ſhall be engaged, our anxiety is vain, and our labour will be fruitleſs. This is a diſcovery reſerved for an immortal ſtate, and which, in the preſent life, after all our reſearches, we can know but in part; for "it does not now appear what we ſhall be." We are only certain that the righteous will enjoy complete felicity, that the happineſs of man and the glory of God will ultimately be effected,

In this limited condition of human knowledge, it is our duty not only to be patient, but acquieſcent; not to conſider the partial ſucceſs of our enquiries as a grievance, to which we muſt from neceſſity ſubmit, but as the beneficial diſpenſation of infinite wiſdom, conducive to our preſent improvement and future felicity. We ſhould reſt aſſured, that a fuller communication of knowledge would not operate for our benefit. It is indeed probable, that its conſequences

ſequences might be very pernicious, ſince our minds, too apt to wander, might be thus diverted from thoſe attainments which are eſſential to holineſs in this world, and happineſs in the next. We ſhould therefore teſtify our obedience by a diligent inveſtigation of ſubjects adequate to our comprehenſion, and neceſſary to our peace, convinced that our Creator equally conſults our benefit in what he communicates and in what he withholds; and waiting, with humble hope, for that perfect ſtate in which the ſoul ſhall no longer be entangled in the perplexities of uncertainty, and involved in the miſts of ignorance, but ſhall be ſatisfied with the enjoyment of knowledge adequate to the improved condition of her powers.

SERMON XII.

LUKE x. 27.

Thou ſhalt love the Lord thy God, with all thy Heart, and with all thy Soul, and with all thy Strength, and with all thy Mind, and thy Neighbour as thyſelf.

THIS paſſage contains a clear, comprehenſive, and ſatisfactory anſwer to one of the moſt important and univerſal queſtions that can poſſibly be propoſed.

The wiſe and religious, who are ſeriouſly attentive to their beſt intereſts, will receive with gratitude this valuable information, from which they may derive real and eternal benefit. The duties of man are various and extenſive, but may be all traced to the ſame ſacred ſource; and though our actions

actions, from our different ages and ſituations, will ever be diverſified, the principle from which they proceed may be (and to obtain the divine approbation muſt be) the ſame. The love of God, and the love of our neighbour, are the proper motives to virtuous activity, and conſtitute the only baſis of true religion.

Should any other principle direct our actions, their external appearance is of little importance. Whether we are found enjoying the pleaſures of diſſipation, or drudging in the fatigues of buſineſs, performing the exerciſes of devotion, or diſtributing our property to relieve the poor; if love to God, and love to our fellow-creatures, be not the principles ſupremely governing our conduct, we are deficient in our religious character, and want the marks of genuine chriſtianity; we have enliſted under a falſe banner, and if we deceive ourſelves with the hope of reward, ſhall, at the day of judgment, be miſerably diſappointed.

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So evident is the excellence and utility of this principle, that none pretend expreſsly to deny it; yet, when it is applied to the purpoſes of life, men often pervert its meaning, confine its extent, deface its beauty, and deſtroy its effect. To prevent ſo dangerous a perverſion, and imprint the command in its full force and genuine import on our hearts, it will be uſeful to enquire into the particulars which the text contains; and here two conſiderations obviouſly preſent themſelves, an examination of the nature and qualities peculiar to that religious ſentiment which is called the love of God, and an inquiry into what is really intended by the love of our neighbour. There is alſo a third particular, though not equally obvious equally neceſſary, which is their natural and inſeparable connection: Where one is wanting the other cannot exiſt, and by this criterion we ſhall be beſt enabled to determine whether we obey the precept contained in this excellent compendium of chriſtian virtue.

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The paſſion of love, however directed, is a voluntary affection of the mind, called forth by ſome real or imaginary excellence, which is either diſcovered or ſuppoſed to exiſt in the object, upon whom it is exerciſed. The true nature and genuine worth of any thing preſented to our conſideration, can only be properly diſcerned in proportion as our mental faculties are enlightened and exalted. A weak mind will ever laviſh its moſt ardent affection on trivial objects, and a corrupt heart will ſhew its depravity by the unworthineſs of its attachments; for while the pure in ſpirit, and wiſe in underſtanding, elevate their deſires to that God, who is the fountain of goodneſs and ſummit of perfection; the fool, defective in knowledge, and debaſed in principle, confines his higheſt hopes and warmeſt deſires within the narrow circle of ſenſual gratification and unſatisfying ſplendor. It may therefore be eſtabliſhed as an indubitable maxim, that we cannot love thoſe things of whoſe qualities we are altogether ignorant; nor, when acquainted with them, can eſteem them as admirable, unleſs they

are, in ſome meaſure, congenial to our feelings.

From this view it muſt appear abſolutely impoſſible to love God, if we are wholly ſtrangers to his nature, and have never ſeen the beauty and perfection of his attributes. Nor will the utmoſt abſtract knowledge of the perfection of Deity animate our minds to that exalted affection, unleſs we have an heart, which, at leaſt with reſpect to its intentions and deſires, in ſome meaſure participates of the purity and holineſs infinitely and eternally exiſting in the divine mind. A previous knowledge of the dignity and excellence of God, and an extenſive view of his unbounded benevolence to man, are indiſpenſably neceſſary to inflame our breaſts with a real and inextinguiſhable love of our adorable and beneficent Creator.

A view of the magnitude and mercy of God's glorious deſign to bleſs the human race by a recovery from ſin and miſery, and a free invitation to the inheritance of eternal

life, cauſed David to exclaim with a mixture of pious gratitude and holy love, "Lord! what is man that thou art mindful of him, and the ſon of man that thou viſiteſt him?" The infinite value of the gift, and the total want of deſert on the part of the receiver, gave the pſalmiſt ſo juſt and delightful a ſenſe of the unmerited goodneſs of God, as excited his warmeſt admiration; and not only impreſſed on his mind a forcible ſenſe of duty, filled his heart with a principle of inexpreſſible gratitude, but inſpired an ardent love which breaks out into this pious exclamation, to ſupply the want of adequate language.

If we wiſh to partake of this heavenly flame, we muſt endeavour to obtain, like the royal pſalmiſt, correct ideas of the infinite object of our worſhip, and a proper conception of his goodneſs to mankind.

When we contemplate the infinity of Deity, the mind indeed is ſtruck with immediate conſciouſneſs, that the utmoſt ex-

tent of her powers bears no proportion to an object of infinite magnitude. But, though we muſt wait till the veil of mortality be removed, before the ſoul is fully bleſt with the beatific viſion, we may now detach from the mind thoſe corrupt and unworthy apprehenſions of Deity, which the groſſneſs of our paſſions, and the depravity of our nature, too commonly ſuggeſt. For this end we ſhould reflect, that there is nothing temporary or local in the divine nature, and that our God is infinite and unchangeable. Indeed, to render ſacred truths more eaſy to human conception, the inſpired writers figuratively ſpeak of his going forth, and of his turning back; of his intention to puniſh, and his repenting him of the evil; of his love and of his hatred; yet theſe expreſſions only indicate his different providential diſpenſations, adapted to our variety of conduct; but the alteration is in ourſelves; with him is neither variableneſs nor ſhadow of turning; he is the ſame yeſterday, to day, and for ever.

Nor

Nor can any external ſervices, or mere modes of worſhip, though of his own appointment, performed without the holy incenſe of filial affection, be acceptable in his ſight. "What are thouſands of burnt-offerings, or ten thouſand rivers of oil?" Who—(ſays the Almighty to the Iſraelites, when they reſted in their own performances) who hath required theſe things at your hand? God is a ſpirit, and muſt be worſhipped in ſpirit and in truth. By his unlimited power he called us into exiſtence; and by his ſacred word hath invited us to the participation of felicity. Though we may be happy or miſerable, according to our acceptance or refuſal of his mercy, yet he has the ſame benevolent intentions: his offers are free and univerſal. We may deſtroy our peace, and darken our underſtanding, by withdrawing from the fountain of light, and centre of perfection; but the plan of creation and redemption remains unalterable, that exhibits to the humble and intelligent Chriſtian, one continued emanation of unbounded goodneſs, one general tender of exalted felicity, dictated by

infinite love, and ſupported by eternal truth.

The laws impreſſed on nature, and the commands revealed to man, are beautiful parts of the ſame comprehenſive ſyſtem; and, when rightly underſtood, and implicitly obeyed, produce the important purpoſes for which they were deſigned, our temporal comfort and eternal happineſs. This view of the perfection of the Almighty, this conviction of the abundant proviſion made for our future bliſs, will, properly operating, excite that love to the divine being, which can neither be faint nor tranſitory; but which we ſhall ſtrive to retain and encreaſe "with all our heart, with all our ſoul, with all our ſtrength, and with all our mind."

This love to God is the firſt and greateſt command; with which the ſecond is inſeparably connected; "thou ſhalt love thy neighbour as thyſelf." Our Saviour knew the ſtrong bias of the human mind to a narrow, intereſted, and ſelfiſh diſpoſition, contrary

trary to that extenſive and ſocial ſyſtem which is the genuine ſpirit of the Goſpel, and which is eſſential to human happineſs. He therefore affectionately warns us againſt this wide and pernicious deviation from rectitude and felicity, by inculcating a doctrine of an oppoſite nature, exalted in its principle, and beneficial in its effects; for, while a ſordid ſelf-love contracts the heart, confining its views to individual gratification, or the narrow circle of kindred connection; the Chriſtian doctrine expands the breaſt with extenſive affection, which not only indulges a wiſh, but ſeeks and embraces the opportunity of advancing the happineſs of all mankind.

Nothing can more clearly evince the excellence of this general and unconfined love of our neighbour, than to ſuppoſe, for a moment, its univerſal prevalence, and then conſider its immediate effect in the production of happineſs.

Did a powerful ſentiment of benevolence pervade every breaſt, and knit the inhabi-

tants of the earth in one bond of ſocial union, how would the multitude of human miſeries inſtantaneouſly diminiſh! The horrors of war would ceaſe to alarm the dwellings of the weak and defenceleſs, to threaten their property, and endanger their lives; endleſs litigation would no more give birth to hateful paſſion, and diſtract our peace with anxiety for the event; we ſhould not be ſtung with envy by viewing the proſperity of another, when we knew ourſelves equally intereſted in his ſucceſs; the keen ſenſation of want could only be experienced when rigorous ſeaſons ſuſpend fertility; conſtant and extenſive poverty would be totally unknown; vain ſtruggles to poſſeſs property would be changed into endeavours to communicate aſſiſtance; the weak would be free from oppreſſion, and the wealthy ſecure from plunder.

Innumerable evils would be effectually removed, and even thoſe which are more deeply involved in our nature greatly alleviated. Prompt aſſiſtance and general compaſſion would ſoften the anguiſh of pain,

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and mitigate the miſeries of diſeaſe. Though the tender parent and affectionate partner, when death had removed the object of their attachment, muſt regret the afflicting loſs, yet the powerful conſolation would be ever at hand, that they were ſtill ſurrounded by objects worthy of their confidence, and ready to return their affections. The bleſſings of Providence would be continually multiplied, till exuberant plenty viſited every corner of the earth, and the cordial glow of genuine friendſhip animated every heart, and brightened every countenance.

Though this ſuperlative felicity cannot be expected, as the paſſions and prejudices of mankind reſiſt rather than embrace the principle of benevolence; yet in proportion as chriſtian philanthropy is extended, the greater and more conſpicuous will be its beneficial effects. Though there may be caſes, when from its ſingularity it may produce few temporal advantages to its poſſeſſor, yet its ſpiritual bleſſings are certain and immediate. A conſciouſneſs of acting in conformity to the harmonious ſyeſtem of

our Creator will ever attend its operation, and fully ſatisfy the real Chriſtian without any inferior reward. But temporal happineſs is always in ſome degree promoted by the exerciſe of this exalted virtue, even in the preſent corrupted ſtate of mankind.

The pious believer, who under the influence of this divine command, extends his affection to the whole human race, and is always ready to communicate his temporal property to the neceſſitous, may, by a covetous and irreligious world, be pitied as weak, but cannot be purſued with hatred as wicked; they may publicly ridicule him as an enemy to himſelf, but muſt ſecretly admire him as a friend to the diſtreſſed. Though from their contracted conceptions they cannot underſtand the enlarged principle which governs his conduct, nor enter into the extenſive liberality of his views; yet the apparent diſintereſtedneſs viſible in all his actions will often repreſs their cenſure, and that utility of which they are themſelves frequent witneſſes and occaſional

onal partakers, muſt ſometimes extort their approbation.

Indeed ſplendid acts of generoſity will always obtain popular admiration, as they are ſuppoſed to proceed from a quality which the bulk of mankind pretend to admire, and would be thought to poſſeſs; but very different in nature, and far more diffuſive in operation is that love of our neighbour which religion inſpires. That love ſeeks not to attract our notice by glaring inſtances of oſtentation, but pervades the whole conduct of the poſſeſſor; not only relieves the wretched but conquers revenge, extinguiſhes animoſities, prevents contention, encreaſes by ſincere and heart-felt gratulations the bleſſings of proſperity, and ſoftens by the aſpect of tender ſympathy the rigours of adverſity.

But this extenſive love to our fellow-creatures, this unreſerved ſurrender of ſelfiſh feelings can reſt on no ſolid foundation, except an implicit obedience to the command of that God, whoſe infinite good-

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neſs has rendered him the ſupreme object of our love, and whoſe benevolent plan we are deſirous to imitate. Without an enlarged regard for the welfare of mankind, our religion is vain, and without a real and ardent love to God, our moral practice muſt be defective. According to the different tempers, views, and propenſities of men, they have often been induced to magnify one of theſe duties at the expence of the other; but if we take a view of their ſucceſs, in the proſecution of their partial and miſtaken ſyſtems, it will appear, that theſe important duties cannot be ſeparated; and that only a ſpecious but inſufficient religion or morality can exiſt independently of each other.

Some, having acquired a melancholy turn of mind, from repeated diſappointments in their temporal views, and diſguſted with their lot in life, have ſought refuge in the gloom of a cloiſter, and there indulged their unſocial turn in continual invectives againſt mankind; flattering themſelves, through miſtaken zeal, that they approached the

altar of God, in proportion to their abſtraction from the world. A rigid auſterity of life, and the regular performance of ceremonies conſtituted their devotion; and, by what they called mortification of the fleſh, they have gained ſuch an imaginary conqueſt over their paſſions, as has inſpired them with ſpiritual pride, and induced them to view the unhallowed multitude with contempt. In the exultation of fancied holineſs, and falſe dignity, the phariſaic votary of ſolitude, has ſaid to an humble fellow-ſinner, "ſtand by thyſelf, for I am holier than thou." This has been eſteemed exemplary religion, and from its apparent ſanctity, has obtained the veneration of the vulgar; but when compared with the oracles of truth, is found to be nothing more than bigotry and ſuperſtition. True religion wears not ſo forbidding an aſpect, nor poſſeſſes ſo contracted an heart. The religion of the Goſpel is open and inviting, affable and condeſcending, delights to mix with mankind, and to bleſs by aſſociation.

Nor are they more ſucceſsful, who lay claim to exalted philanthropy, and extenſive good-will towards man, independent of religion. Indeed it cannot be denied, that noble acts of beneficence may be and are ſometimes performed by the irreligious, and that inſtances of diſintereſted generoſity are found in characters not diſtinguiſhed by their piety. Of theſe laudable actions, in whatever quarter they appear, we ſeek not to depreciate the value or deny the excellence; yet laudable as they are, and worthy of imitation, they, if not founded in the love of God, fall far ſhort of loving our neighbour as ourſelves. It is not a few ſhining inſtances, but the general tenor of conduct that conſtitutes a character; and the anti-chriſtian moraliſt, weighed in the impartial balance of reaſon will be found wanting. Many glaring atchievments and ſplendid acts of bounty have aſtoniſhed the unthinking crowd, which, when brought to the teſt of examination, were no more than the diſplay of oſtentation, or the production of momentary impulſe. Such may be performed while the heart is a ſtranger

to the divine law of univerſal kindneſs, and deſtitute of conſtant and rational benevolence.

Let it not however be ſuppoſed, that in contending for a continued and permanent love to our neighbour, we adviſe the Chriſtian to check thoſe inſtantaneous emotions of tenderneſs and pity, which extraordinary occaſions and uncommon objects of diſtreſs excite. No: theſe opportunities he is commanded to embrace; "whatever thine hand finds to do, do it with all thy might," is a ſcriptural injunction. The diſciple of that bleſſed Redeemer, whoſe time on earth was employed in ſeeking and relieving diſtreſs, will never adopt a frigid prudence to reſtrain the kind ſuggeſtions of compaſſion, or damp the ardent emotions of generoſity: he will be ever ready to join, as far as circumſtances admit, in all the noble, generous, and uſeful undertakings, that the moral world are inclined to practiſe or approve. But beſides theſe, he will cheriſh a conſtant and uniform habit of conſulting, on common and ſecret occaſions,

ſions, the welfare of his fellow-creatures; and where he wants the power to be beneficial, the principle will ſtill appear, and prevent the ſordid influence of ſelf-intereſt from rendering his conduct injurious to others. In any ſituation, however low, and unfriendly to his bountiful diſpoſition, he will by his humility and affable deportment, promote the harmony, and encreaſe the comforts of thoſe who are ſo happy as to form the circle of his acquaintance.

Admitting the philanthropy of the world to be more prevalent and extenſive than it appears from obſervation, it has yet one ſtriking defect, compared with that of the Chriſtian, as it cannot be founded on ſo durable a baſis. The ingratitude of mankind, and the unworthineſs of many who ſolicit, and by artifice obtain relief, will check the benevolence, and limit the bounty of him who looks not beyond the preſent life. He cannot deſire to exerciſe beneficence farther than it tends to advance his worldly happineſs; and as he diſcovers, by experience, more of human depravity,

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his concern for others will gradually diminiſh; whence ariſes that melancholy but accurate obſervation, that old age ſinks as much below youth in generoſity as in activity and ſtrength. But the unworthineſs of objects, or the ingratitude of the world, will not diminiſh the philanthropy of the Chriſtian, which is derived from the divine injunction and example. He is too attentive to his own failings, to view with inexorable ſeverity thoſe of others, thankful that his crimes have not finally precluded him from divine favour, he will not withhold his aſſiſtance even from the perverſe and ungrateful, in caſes of heavy affliction and urgent neceſſity. While his conduct is thus beneficial, he will not permit any of his actions to oppoſe its general tenor; unlike to thoſe who abſtract benevolence from religion, and who, while they relieve one part of mankind by their bounty, often diſtract the other by their malice, ambition, or revenge.

The Chriſtian in thus cultivating the principles of love to God and to his neighbour,

bour, is preparing for that ſtate, whence every ſordid and contentious paſſion ſhall be for ever abſent. The ſoul, replete with holy affection, longs for the ſociety of thoſe perfect beings, whoſe love, like their felicity, knows not interruption; among whom the ſlave of ſelfiſh depravity would be neither an happy nor a welcome reſident: while we, as heirs of future happineſs, continue in conſcientious obedience to the commands of God, we ſhall find that which was at firſt a duty, become at laſt a delight; and ſhall acquire ſuch habitual love to our Creator, and to our fellow-creatures, that we ſhall feel no inclination, but rather the utmoſt repugnance to any tranſgreſſion of theſe divine precepts.

SER-

SERMON XIII.

EPHESIANS v. 16.

Redeeming the Time becauſe the Days are evil.

IT is a common but lamentable obſervation, that nothing is of ſo much value as time; and that yet nothing is ſquandered with ſo little attention.

The man of buſineſs, immediately occupied in ſome lucrative employment, will indeed feel its loſs as the loſs of ſo much property; and will not ſuffer the ſtrongeſt ſolicitations, or the moſt inviting allurements, to draw him aſide from the undeviating purſuit of gain; yet, that man cannot be ſaid to entertain a juſt idea of the real importance of time, who confines it

to the means of acquiring wealth: for while he profeſſes the higheſt ſenſe of its value in practice, he depreciates its excellence, and perverts its uſe.

Some portion of our time muſt indeed be dedicated to a moderate ſupply of our corporeal wants, and a prudent proviſion of thoſe accommodations neceſſary for our paſſage through the preſent world; but this ſhould always be conſidered as a ſubordinate, though neceſſary employment, and ſhould never preclude an uniform and ſerious attention to the important purpoſes for which we were called into exiſtence.

A great part of mankind, however, appear deſtitute of all ſenſe of its value; neglecting at once the intereſts of this world and the next. Perſons of this deſcription ſeem, if not more culpable, leſs ſuſceptible of reformation, ſince, while thoſe only miſtake their object, theſe ſuffer a relaxation of their powers. The attention of the former muſt be transferred, that of the latter awakened and invigorated.

The text before us evidently implies, the great value and importance of time; a great and dangerous neglect of its improvement, on the part of the Epheſians, to whom the words were addreſſed; and a poſſibility of ſtill repairing the loſs, ſince he exhorts them to redeem the time.

To have proper apprehenſions of the value of time, we muſt conſider the purpoſes for which it was allotted, and the very different effects reſulting from its uſe and abuſe.

We are by nature at a diſtance from God, in a ſtate of guilt, and poſſeſſed of diſpoſitions inimical to peace and offenſive to duty. In this helpleſs ſtate, divine goodneſs graciouſly propoſes to our acceptance, a plan of recovery; and the time afforded us, from the cradle to the grave, is the ſpace in which we are to liſten to the call of God; to learn obedience to his will, to oppoſe, reſtrain, and ſubdue, by the aid of divine grace, the corruption of our nature, and become meet for the eternal enjoyment of

the divine preſence in the kingdom of heaven.

Whoever ſeriouſly conſiders the importance of this work, muſt acknowledge, that we have no time to loſe. Our continuance in this world is ſhort and precarious, but the work we have to perform, certain and momentous. The length of our reſidence here is by no means aſcertained, but our departure is poſitively determined.

No one of us can boaſt the certainty of living another hour; but that all ſhall die, we may without heſitation declare.

If we ſuppoſe ourſelves in the laſt ſtage of our mortal exiſtence, looking forward to our appearance before the univerſal Judge, and realizing to view the laſting glory or endleſs miſery, to which an unerring and unalterable deciſion ſhall conſign us, a few moments will appear of infinite value. Where is the man, who, in his laſt hours, would not wiſh to draw near to God by intenſe and ardent prayer? Where is the man,

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who, at the extremity of life, would not earneſtly deſire another opportunity of evincing his faith, by the exerciſe of benevolence?

Since then we know not the exact ſpace, that may yet remain for the performance of theſe important duties, how ſhould we prize the moments which we have ſtill the power profitably to employ! Every day ſhould be eſteemed as it really is, the day of ſalvation. The preſent hour may teem with the awful event of a ſummons to eternity, may be the final cloſe of our neglected opportunities, the future preclusion of recovery and reconciliation.

Indulging, however, the perhaps deluſive idea, that this tremendous period is diſtant; yet, when we reflect that the life of a Chriſtian is progreſſive, that he hath much to accompliſh, many evil habits to remove, many inordinate affections to overcome, and many ſpiritual graces to acquire, every moment will appear of too much value to paſs without a due attention to im-

provement; ſince, though the ſpace appointed for our continuance here, is ſufficient to the purpoſe for which it was intended, we have no part to laviſh or neglect.

But though the value of time is manifeſt, and indeed generally acknowledged, yet this conviction is not ſufficiently influential on our practice. Hours, days, months and years, are too often ſuffered to glide away, not only without any ſerious and regular endeavours at improvement, but are employed in the ſervice of vice and violation of the divine commands.

This evidently had taken place with reſpect to the Epheſians, ſince by the expreſſion, "Redeeming the time," the apoſtle plainly intimates an antecedent loſs.

The Epheſians, before their converſion, were diſtinguiſhed for their zeal in the cauſe of idolatry. Their city boaſted that ſplendid monument of folly and impiety, the Temple of Diana, which inſpired that deluded

luded people with ſuch inveterate ſuperſtition, that nothing but the all-powerful energy of divine grace, could have changed the object of their adoration.

The Apoſtle therefore alludes to the time miſ-ſpent in their former idolatrous worſhip, and in tranſgreſſions of the moral law. This delinquency they muſt have been ready to acknowledge, as they had renounced their former mode of worſhip, and adopted purer principles, to regulate their preſent belief, and govern their future lives.

They however had ignorance to plead as an extenuation of their guilt, prior to converſion; while thoſe who have been educated Chriſtians, may be equally charged with miſ-ſpending time, without the alleviating comfort of an excuſe; we acknowledge the exiſtence of an unerring rule, however we may neglect to uſe it.

But if we have neglected many of the opportunities of conſulting the ſacred ora-

cles of God, and ſuffered the underſtanding to remain uncultivated in ſpiritual things, amidſt that exuberance of inſtruction with which the treaſures of inſpiration abound, what can we plead? We have had every neceſſary information, and yet how often have we ſuffered worldly vanities to break in upon our moſt ſolemn reſolutions, and allure us far from the path which conſcience enjoined us to purſue! Can we not recollect numerous inſtances, wherein by indulging, we have ſtrengthened evil propenſities, and employed our time in a manner diametrically oppoſite to the dictates of our own hearts, and the direction of ſcripture?

And where we have not yielded to flagrant deviations from duty, and actual commiſſion of crimes, have we not loitered in the chriſtian race, omitted the obſervance of religious ordinances requiſite for our ſpiritual advancement, or performed them with inattention which deſtroyed their efficacy?

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If many inſtances of this nature are obliterated from our memory, or cannot be called to immediate recollection; if we feel no inclination to accuſe ourſelves of culpable delay, or ſinful neglect, can we have the boldneſs to affirm, that our progreſs has been adequate to the length of our profeſſion?

The means of grace are afforded, not that we ſhould remain in our preſent ſtate, but that we ſhould diligently uſe them in making our calling and election ſure, that our faith ſhould become more fixed and permanent; our view of divine things more clear and ſatisfactory; our deſires after holineſs more vigorous and conſtant, and our attachments to the world fewer and leſs violent.

If theſe effects are not produced, our religious profeſſion is vain; the end of divine ordinances remains unanſwered; and we have reaſon to regret our negligent and criminal loſs of time.

It is however far from my intention to inſinuate, that all are equally guilty. Let the ſincere Chriſtian derive, from the retroſpect of occaſional negligence, a principle of reſolution, which may quicken his diligence, and animate his zeal. He will indeed find, that all his opportunities have not been neglected, but that faith has, through divine grace, become more operative in regulating his life and purifying his deſires; yet he will lament, with filial, not deſponding ſorrow, that the goodneſs of his celeſtial Parent has not found ſuitable returns of gratitude; that he has been guilty of many faults, and has omitted many duties.

But though we may have been culpably deficient, in neglecting the improvement of our time, the evil is not without remedy. Time, in a ſpiritual ſenſe, may be redeemed; and this is the grand object to which the recollection and lamentation of paſt errors ſhould direct us; ſince to conſume our hours in unavailing and barren remorſe,

remorſe, is only to make new additions to the loſs already ſuſtained.

It is indeed, in a liberal ſenſe, evident, that the hours once elapſed can never be recalled, and that we cannot again enjoy the ſame actual opportunities, which we have neglected to embrace. If our youth has been ſquandered in vanity and folly, we can never again enjoy that ſeaſon of lively ſpirits and enterpriſing ſtrength, ſo capable of utility in the ſervice of virtue, but ſo often devoted to the cauſe of vice.

Yet, though it is impoſſible to drive back the rapid and irreſiſtible current of rolling years; if, at any period, we are deeply impreſſed with a ſenſe of our miſconduct and guilt, in diſobeying the commands of God, and abuſing the offers of his mercy;—if we feel genuine and ſincere contrition for our offences, and ardently deſire to "bring forth fruits meet for repentance," the way to ſalvation is ſtill open; and, through the merits of a crucified Saviour,

viour, the ſentence incurred by former crimes and inattention, may be obliterated.

Redeeming the time, in the ſenſe conveyed by the apoſtolic exhortation, conſiſts in deriving from our paſt miſapplication of former advantages, an additional motive to future diligence and attention. Much internal comfort, and holy ſerenity, have been loſt by neglect; for though returning prodigals may by repentance and faith, become partakers of divine mercy, and objects of divine protection, though they may receive, with humble thankfulneſs, the promiſes contained in the ſacred volume, yet they cannot, in the nature of things, have that joy and peace in believing, and feel in their hearts that conformity to the will of God, experienced by the Chriſtian who has long and ſucceſsfully reſiſted oppoſing paſſions, and an alluring world.

No age nor circumſtances will preclude an humble and contrite heart from acceptance at the throne of grace; but our life is ſtill a warfare, and a firm and unſhaken faith,

faith, a ſure and certain hope, and the pure and divine feelings of chriſtian philanthropy muſt be gradually acquired. A total exemption from the fears of futurity, and a tranquil ſtate of mind under every temporal trial is the work of time and a progreſſive proceſs.

Our former miſcarriages ſhould not only quicken our zeal, but alſo increaſe our caution, and render us more expert in avoiding thoſe errors, to which unreſiſted temptation may often have expoſed us. The warrior, who has never been vanquiſhed, though his reputation is more ſplendid, may be leſs on his guard againſt the artful ſtratagems of his enemies, than he who has been defeated, and has by experience learned to conquer. Though we muſt always conſider paſt miſconduct with regret, yet it is our buſineſs to derive from it every poſſible advantage, in order, ſo far as in our power, to repair its ill effects, and thus, in a ſcriptural ſenſe, " to redeem the time."

As

As an additional argument, the Apoſtle reminded the Epheſian church, that the days were evil, alluding to the frequent perſecutions which the primitive Chriſtians ſuffered, who, often driven from their place of reſidence, and forcibly ſeparated, were in danger of loſing ſome of the moſt effectual means of grace, when the weakneſs of an infant church moſt required ſupport.

Of theſe calamities we are not now under any appehenſion. Chriſtianity is the eſtabliſhed religion of our nation, and perſecution is unknown in our land. But eaſe and ſecurity have introduced ſuch indolence and careleſſneſs amongſt us, that the danger of delinquency, and the neceſſity of vigilance, are as great as in the apoſtolic age.

It may therefore with equal propriety, though from a different cauſe, be affirmed of the preſent time, that "the days are evil." The formality and coldneſs which prevail among modern Chriſtians, have a con-

contagious influence inimical to the ſpirit of vital religion, and require the utmoſt diligence and circumſpection, without which we cannot eſcape thoſe dangers which lurk under ſpecious appearances, and beſet us on every ſide.

From this moment may inactivity and delay be baniſhed from our religious conduct; for in proportion to our holy attainments will be, not only our future reward, but alſo our preſent ſatisfaction. We ſhall proceed towards the manſions of eternal glory, through a path enlightened by the ray of chearfulneſs, rendered ſmooth by perſevering diligence, and from which ſincere penitence has eradicated the thorns of remorſe.

Our vigilance will be honoured and ſecured by divine protection. Temptations, repeatedly baffled, will ſhrink from our approach; we ſhall enter in triumph the aſſembly of the juſt, and receive their rapturous congratulations, in the regions of unmoleſted peace and everlaſting joy.

SER-

SERMON XIV.

Acts xxiv. 16.

And herein do I exercise myself, to have always a Conscience void of Offence toward God and toward Men.

THE words of my text were spoken by the great Apostle of the Gentiles, before the Roman governor, in answer to the artful accusation of the orator Tertullus; who, in his exordium, had adopted the method prescribed by the ancient masters of rhetoric, flattering the judge. The power of adulation is so great, that a magistrate may be, under its influence, disposed to hear with favourable attention the succeeding parts of an oration, which, in its commencement, has put him in good-humour with himself. Tertullus therefore praises him

him as a governor, from whoſe conduct the province of Judea had derived the moſt valuable advantages; and then proceeds to accuſe St. Paul as a ſupporter of hereſy, and mover of ſedition.

The apoſtle, in his reply, ſhews himſelf replete with ability, yet ſcorns to laviſh unmerited praiſe on Felix, whoſe conduct appears, both from ſacred and profane hiſtory, to have been far from that of an upright magiſtrate. St. Paul therefore only expreſſes his ſatisfaction at the length of time, during which he had been ruler of that nation, which muſt have furniſhed him with a degree of knowledge in the Jewiſh cuſtoms, ſufficient to enable him to decide, on queſtions relative to the peculiar law of the people whom he governed, with more preciſion, than could be expected from one who had been recently appointed.

It could not however be expected, that Felix had any ſtrong attachment to the Jewiſh law, or would greatly intereſt himſelf

ſelf in a diſpute between the ſupporters of different opinions. It might more naturally be imagined, that, when uninfluenced by corruption, he would be more attentive to the moral conduct, than to the ſentiments of thoſe under his government. The former he might conſider as eſſential to the ſecurity of his province; the latter he might view as merely ſpeculative, imagining, that while the minds of men were buſied in religious diſputes, they would have leſs leiſure and inclination to engage in political conſpiracies dangerous to the ſtate.

On this account, the Apoſtle, in his defence, does not endeavour particularly to explain the nature of his controverſy with the Jews; but inſiſts, that he had not been guilty of any ſeditious or immoral practices, and expreſſes the integrity of his conduct in the comprehenſive words of the text, which include the whole of chriſtian morality. It might indeed have appeared ſufficient, if he could have proved himſelf an inoffenſive or uſeful member of ſociety, to thoſe who imagine that our duty to our Creator has

has little or no concern with our actions relative to the community. Whether this would have been ſatisfactory to the Roman governor I know not, but it is certain, that there is no ſecurity for the good conduct of thoſe who raiſe not their view to the author of their exiſtence, but ſeek merely the approbation of men. They may indeed avoid in the general, any actions which tend to the injury of ſociety, and may even perform exploits greatly conducive to the general good. But applauſe is not always obtained by merit, and he who ſeeks to approve himſelf only to his fellow-creatures, will often, when diſappointed, relinquiſh a plan which he finds unſucceſsful, and to which he was ſtimulated by the hope of popularity. There are occaſions, when we may gratify others, by a conduct which really tends to injure them, and when we cannot ſerve without offending them. In theſe caſes, integrity muſt be founded on a ſtronger baſis than a deſire of human approbation, to continue firm againſt oppoſition and diſgrace.

A conſcience void of offence towards God, is the only ſecurity for uniformity of acting in worldly affairs. Our regard to the divine will can alone give us real integrity, and render us inflexibly virtuous. He, who ſeeks the favour of God, in preference to all other conſiderations, will forbear to injure his fellow-creatures, and endeavour to aſſiſt them, becauſe in ſuch a conduct he obeys the commands of his Creator. The applauſe or cenſure of mankind, which often induce pride and intimidate from virtue, will be beheld as trivial and unimportant by him who is in the habit of ſeeking divine approbation. Religion, as it is the moſt uniform, as well as moſt correct ſtandard, is the beſt ſecurity for continuance in well-doing, the only certain direction without which integrity cannot exiſt. Conſcience to be void of offence muſt have for its chief object the will of Deity, and conſider every deviation from obedience to the divine mandates, though concealed from mortals, as a flagrant tranſgreſſion: the influence of a tender conſcience extends to the inmoſt thoughts; and

regulates

regulates the diſpoſition, by checking every emotion of envy, malice, or revenge, in their earlieſt ſtage; reſtraining every inordinate deſire before it has ariſen to a dangerous height, and counteracting every evil propenſity before it has acquired irreſiſtable ſtrength. In proportion as we conſult conſcience, we ſhall become more ſcrupulous in reſpect to the indulgence of tempers and inclinations. The Chriſtian thinks it neither conſiſtent with ſafety nor with innocence, even to permit a train of ideas to occupy the mind, which it would be criminal to reduce to action. He knows that the moſt ſecret receſſes of the ſoul are open to the view of omniſcience, and is therefore deſirous that purity ſhould reſide in a heart, which he humbly dedicates as a temple to Deity; and therefore he endeavours to expel from thence thoſe evil diſpoſitions, which, like the buyers and ſellers driven out by our Saviour, profane the ſacred manſion.

Such exact ſeverity in our private thoughts will not make us ſit looſe to mankind, or

inattentive to the ſocial duties of life; but rather prepare for their performance on a higher and more extenſive ſcale. Conſcience will ſtimulate the Chriſtian to ſet a good example, not from a principle of oſtentation, but for the ſervice of mankind. He will examine his heart in private, that its iſſues in public may be more pure; he will review his conduct, that he may conſtantly amend it; and contemplate the perfections of Deity, as the divine example he is called to imitate. Sincerely imploring forgiveneſs for paſt offences, (a conſtant employment of a tender conſcience) is in effect ſoliciting grace to reſiſt future temptations; and returning thanks with heart-felt gratitude for the beneficence of our heavenly Father, is giving an earneſt for our exerciſing the ſame towards our fellow-mortals. Another eſſential and important mark of a conſcience void of offence towards God, is an alacrity to join in the public worſhip he has inſtituted, and to unite in thoſe prayers and thankſgivings, which are offered up, at ſtated periods, in religious aſſemblies. Petitions are enforced, gratitude is excited, and zeal animated, by the con-

concurrence of numbers in the ſame holy exerciſes. Our attendance therefore on public ordinances ſhould be regular, and our deportment becoming, equally diſtant from an oſtentatious appearance of ſanctity, and from careleſs inattention. The conſcientious Chriſtian ſolicitous to recommend piety by his example, will not, by a diſguſting auſterity, affright mankind from the purſuit of holineſs; but will, like the Apoſtle, "become," ſo far as is conſiſtent with innocence, "all things to all men, that he may gain ſome."

A conſcience void of offence towards God and towards men, correſponds with the two great branches of duty to God, and to our neighbour. There are certain virtues which may be diſtinctly arranged under each of theſe heads, yet moſt of our duties are in a degree connected with both. As every good office, performed to men, may be, without impropriety, included in our duty to God; ſo thoſe acts, by which we more immediately expreſs reverence to our Maker, frequently operate, in a conſi-

derable degree, to the benefit of our neighbour. Thus our obſervance of thoſe rites, which our church has appointed to expreſs our reverence for Deity, may ſtimulate others to imitate what they ſecretly approve, but to which they have been inattentive, through the prevalence of ill example; and it is probable, that many who are thus allured to an attendance on religious aſſemblies, may gradually acquire a love to holineſs, and become at length proficients in piety. Thus the moſt happy effects may be produced to our fellow-creatures; by our ſacred exerciſes we may tend to inſpire them with virtue here, and lead them to ſeek for the happineſs hereafter.

The very deportment of a Chriſtian who makes a conſcience even of minute things, will alſo, while it is expreſſive of his duty to God, conſiderably advance the good of mankind. He will take every proper opportunity, in converſation, of recommending virtue and religion; yet without aſſuming dictatorial authority, or diſguſting his companions by unſeaſonable or tireſome

lectures

lectures of morality. He will delight moſt in the ſociety of thoſe, who are the ſincere followers of his Redeemer; yet in the company of others will not neglect, much leſs betray the cauſe of religion. He cannot ſmile at a prophane jeſt, nor even ſuffer it to paſs unreproved; yet feels not indignation, but pity towards thoſe, who daringly defy the vengeance of their Maker, in order to court the applauſe of the licentious. His affability and cheerfulneſs will convince all who know him, that religion is a ſource even of temporal happineſs, and that the tranſient pleaſures of vice are far ſurpaſſed by the permanent delights of virtue. If any thing can induce mankind to grow in love with holineſs, it is its being preſented in ſuch an attractive form; by ſuch a practical exhibition, they may be inſenſibly led to imitate what they cannot but behold with affectionate approbation.

A conſcience void of offence towards men will alſo ſtimulate the poſſeſſor, not only to avoid every act of injuſtice, but to embrace every occaſion of benevolence. He will

will be cautious, leſt in the lawful avocations of temporal affairs, he ſhould inadvertently involve any one in diſtreſs, by the improvement of his own circumſtances. He will ſhrink with horror from the idea of raiſing his fortune on another's ruin, and will rather ſubmit to indigence and obſcurity, than obtain opulence and diſtinction, by means inconſiſtent with juſtice and humanity. He will equally avoid injuring the reputation of others, and ſo far from inventing, will not propagate a calumny, nor haſtily credit an aſperſion.

His conſcience however would not acquit him, were he to ſtop here. He ſeeks opportunities of becoming beneficial to his fellow-creatures, by inſtructing the ignorant, comforting the dejected, and aſſiſting the diſtreſſed. He ſeeks not, like the world, the ſociety of the proſperous; the greateſt recommendations to his notice are virtue and calamity. So far as Providence has furniſhed him with ability, he is ready to ſupply the wants of the neceſſitous, and

conſiders every occaſion of doing good as a ſubject of rejoicing.

It may perhaps be aſked, "who is ſufficient for theſe things?" or I may be accuſed of producing an ideal character. "If this be to have a conſcience void of offence," it may be ſaid, "ſuch a character muſt have been peculiar to St. Paul, but is unattainable by the degenerate Chriſtians of the preſent day." To enquire what is attainable, would be an uſeleſs attempt. Be it our care to approach as nearly to this character as human infirmity will admit; without relaxing our endeavours on account of the difficulty of our taſk, the conſideration of which ſhould rather ſtimulate us to activity. The Apoſtle himſelf does not in the text aſſert, that he was free from imperfection; his expreſſion, "herein do I exerciſe myſelf," ſeems to imply, that he aimed at a higher degree of holineſs than he had yet attained; and certainly indicates, that much care and attention were neceſſary to preſerve that proficiency in the chriſtian life, at which he was arrived.

Without

Without ſtopping to enquire whether we can fully attain to his improvements, let us therefore earneſtly reſolve to imitate his vigilance.

Whatever powers we poſſeſs, or whatever may be the degrees of holineſs poſſible to attain, this one thing we can do, we can exerciſe ourſelves. Every meaſure of grace is given to profit withal, and every exertion will be attended with certain and valuable improvement. Delay and diſappointment, the conſtant attendants upon the labours of the worldly, are baniſhed from the ſpiritual kingdom. If we ſeek we ſhall find, nothing ſhall be able to retard our progreſs, nothing intercept our final reward.

Animated by the certain hope of ſalvation, and relying on the promiſes of God, let us exerciſe ourſelves by attending frequently and ſeriouſly to the unbiaſſed and impartial dictates of conſcience. Let us not endeavour to evade the reproofs of this monitor by ſophiſtry, nor ſtifle them by diſſipa-

diſſipation. On the contrary, let us ſeek to give them their full force, and determine to abide by their deciſions; thus we may correct what is amiſs in principles or in irregular conduct; gradually rectify and improve our diſpoſitions; and at length attain a degree of holineſs and happineſs which may now be deemed impoſſible.

To thoſe who have been long unaccuſtomed to reflection, conſcience may have become in a degree obſcure, and incapable of clearly determining on ſome occaſions; yet even ſuch, if they attend to its ſuggeſtions may be recovered; at firſt, its voice will be the voice of alarm and terror; but dreadful as it may be, it ſhould be heard, for it calls to retreat and ſafety. Let ſuch apply, by prayer, to infinite mercy for pardon, and to infinite wiſdom for direction, and then their conſcience will ſoon become more enlightened, it will diſtinctly admoniſh them to ſeek the means of recovery, and in the end whiſper peace; but even when its tone is changed to approbation,

tion, when it becomes void of offence, it muſt be our conſtant guide.

Not only thoſe who are immerſed in ſin and folly, but the greateſt proficients in religion, will find it uſeful and neceſſary conſtantly to conſult and attend to the admonitions of conſcience; its juſtification when they act aright, will abundantly compenſate for its reproofs. If they are careful to derive advantage from its faithful ſuggeſtions, every vice will be ſubdued, and every virtue improved, till holineſs becomes habitual, and permanent ſerenity takes peaceful poſſeſſion of the mind. We muſt one day appear before God at the final judgment, and we are every day haſtening towards it; at that awful period what can give us confidence? what can ſupport us in the trying moment? nothing unleſs the record in our own boſom anticipate a ſentence in our favour; nothing unleſs we have a conſcience void of offence towards God and towards man.

SERMON XV.

MAT. xiii. 44.

The Kingdom of Heaven is like unto Treaſure hid in a Field; the which when a Man hath found, he hideth, and for Joy thereof goeth, and ſelleth all that he hath, and buyeth that Field.

OUR bleſſed Saviour, in the various parables by which he illuſtrated his doctrine, brings to our view the truths of the Goſpel in ſo many different lights, that we are on every occaſion ſtruck with particular and important circumſtances, which had before been careleſsly obſerved or wholly diſregarded.

The treaſure mentioned in the text muſt be ſo obvious to every hearer, as to require little

little explanation. Eternal happineſs is no doubt ultimately intended, while the idea evidently includes that ſacred Goſpel by which it is revealed; that holy life by which it is attained; and that peace of mind and ſpiritual joy, by which it is in ſome degree anticipated.

The word treaſure was never ſo properly applied, as by our divine teacher on this occaſion; ſince all that is valuable on earth, aſſembled in one aggregate maſs, is of no eſtimation in compariſon of this acquiſition. Not only thoſe things to which men fooliſhly annex imaginary worth, but thoſe, and ſuch there are, whoſe value is great, appear, when compared with everlaſting felicity, trifling as the duſt whoſe preſſure ſtirs not the balance, inſignificant as the dancing atom that floats in the meridian ray.

This treaſure is repreſented as in a ſtate of concealment, both before and after its diſcovery; ſince he who found it dared not attempt to ſeize it, but left it ſecreted, till by

by the proper acquiſition of the place in which it was depoſited, he ſhould become intitled to its poſſeſſion.

We are not informed whether his diſcovery was accidental or the reſult of diligent ſearch. This circumſtance may probably be left doubtful, becauſe both theſe caſes may on different occaſions occur. Some there are who hear the glad tidings of ſalvation, at a time when they are bent on purſuits of a very different nature; who are ſtruck with information which they neither ſought nor expected, and who are convinced by irreſiſtible but caſual evidence of the truth of religion and the importance of eternal life.

Such may properly enough be ſaid to have found this treaſure, but unhappily too many who are favoured with ſuch a diſcovery, act in a very different manner from the perſon in our text; inſtead of purchaſing at the utmoſt expence that which is far dearer than life, they ſcruple to take the leaſt trouble on the occaſion; and

though they think ſalvation worth accepting, if it could be received in the midſt of ſin and vanity, they cannot bear to practiſe the arduous work of ſelf-denial to obtain it. But attachment to the world, and the indulgence of ſome favourite vice prevails; the value of religion gradually diminiſhes in their eſtimation, and its truth begins to be ſuſpected; till at length the aid of infidelity is ſolicited, to allay the terrors of an awful futurity, and ſilence the remonſtrances of an uneaſy conſcience.

This is not ſo often the caſe of thoſe who find this treaſure in conſequence of having diligently ſought it. He who is alarmed at the danger of ſin, and anxious to find a remedy againſt its guilt and deliverance from its power, will, on obtaining clear views of the goſpel-diſpenſation, endeavour to hold faſt what he has obtained. His joy at the proſpect of that happineſs from which he feared an eternal excluſion, and his hope of exemption from that miſery to which he apprehended an eternal conſignment, will make him anxious to

embrace the offers of pardon, whatever vain purſuits he may relinquiſh, whatever guilty delights he may ſacrifice.

The parable informs us, that he who diſcovered the treaſure concealed it, till by the ſale of his poſſeſſions, he was enabled to purchaſe the ſpot where it was depoſited. This aptly alludes to the reluctance which a new convert feels to a diſcovery of thoſe ſerious ſentiments with which he is impreſſed. Conſcious of his imperfection, he avoids a ſudden profeſſion of religion, leſt he ſhould diſgrace it by the immorality of his character, or evince his inconſiſtency by ſome new tranſgreſſion. Doubtful of his own reſolution, and dreading a relapſe, he communicates not to others his pious intentions, till time and perſeverance have encreaſed his confidence. He ſhuns the company of his former prophane aſſociates, yet ſhould he meet them, aſſumes no air of peculiar ſanctity. Perhaps ſo much of vicious habit remains about him, that he cannot bear their ridicule; to which, by an open avowal of his ſentiments, he would

be expoſed; and dreads that contempt too often ſhewn, and which he has formerly expreſſed towards the votaries of religion; particularly to thoſe who have lately forſaken the ſcenes of worldly delight, and the haunts of licentious pleaſure. He conſiders himſelf obnoxious to the cenſure of his more grave acquaintance, who eager in the purſuit of riches, think the time loſt which is dedicated to the duties of religion, and the talents miſapplied which are exerted for any other purpoſe than the accumulation of wealth.

This diffidence, however, does not prevent him from uſing the means neceſſary to obtain this ineſtimable treaſure; "He ſelleth all that he hath;" every worldly conſideration muſt be given up which is inconſiſtent with the precepts of the Goſpel; and thoſe attachments which are not in themſelves ſinful, muſt be looſened to ſuch a degree, as not to engroſs too much of our attention. The eager purſuit of riches is incompatible with true religion; ſince the mind intent on gain, will not be

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ſufficiently ſuſceptible of fraternal affection towards mankind, and of chriſtian charity. To be active in aſſiſting others, and ready to relieve the indigent, is commanded as a duty; but this is not to be expected from the man whoſe whole attention is fixed on the acquiſition of wealth, ſince every donation beſtowed on the neceſſitous, is a diminution of thoſe riches which he is deſirous of encreaſing; every hour dedicated to the aſſiſtance of the diſtreſſed, is conſidered as the loſs of ſome opportunity of temporal advantage. If then the ſordid paſſion of avarice has taken poſſeſſion of the mind, its ſuggeſtions muſt be diſregarded, and its authority diſowned. Riches muſt be conſidered in their proper light, and not ſuffered to ſtand in competition with the concerns of eternity.

An inordinate fondneſs for applauſe, the anxious deſire of temporary fame, muſt alſo be relinquiſhed, or in the language of ſcripture "ſold," by thoſe who are deſirous of purchaſing the treaſure of eternal life. It is true, the love of fame will often

incite men to the performance of actions highly uſeful to ſociety, and where no ſuperior motive exiſts, may in ſome meaſure be neceſſary as a ſtimulus to good and a reſtraint from evil; but the chriſtian will perform the moſt glorious actions from nobler principles, and ſhun the perpetration of crimes, not becauſe they diſgrace, but becauſe they defile the offender. Reputation may be obtained by artifice, and ſupported by hypocriſy; virtue may ſometimes be deſpiſed for its ſingularity, while ſplendid and exalted vice receive the acclamations of unthinking multitudes. Such applauſe is of no eſtimation in the opinion of thoſe who ſeek not the favour of mortals, but deſire to obtain the divine approbation; to purchaſe which they are content in obſcurity or diſgrace, if popularity cannot be obtained without the ſacrifice of virtue. The emotions of pride muſt be checked, and if poſſible its principles eradicated. Pride is a paſſion common to moſt ſituations, and which even frequently invades the receſſes of retirement; and though leſs conſpicuous, is equally powerful

ful in the cell as in the palace. It ill becomes a ſinner who is deſirous to follow a crucified Redeemer in his humility, to entertain exalted notions of himſelf, to deſpiſe his fellow-mortals on account of any adventitious circumſtances annexed to his perſon, character, or ſituation. Reflecting that we derive all which we poſſeſs from the unmerited goodneſs of God, no real or fancied excellence ſhould lead us to view with contempt thoſe who, like us, are debtors to the divine bounty; of which if we have received a larger portion, our obligation is greater, and more difficult to diſcharge.

The amuſements and recreations which engage the attention of a great part of mankind, to ſuch a degree as to weaken every other conſideration, muſt be reduced to that rank which alone they deſerve to hold, and conſidered as trifles unworthy the ſerious regard of thoſe who have the important buſineſs to tranſact of a preparation for eternity. The danger of too great an attachment to the moſt innocent diverſions,

has led many who were truly pious, to condemn indiſcriminately every ſpecies of amuſement. Without acceding to this ſtrict prohibition, I muſt obſerve, that whenever recreation renders us careleſs in religion, or withdraws our attention from the important duties which demand it, the effect is of ſo evil a tendency, that we ſhould ſummon all our reſolution to counteract it, and forego whatever may afford us temporary delight, rather than endanger our future peace.

Whoever wiſhes and hopes to obtain ſalvation, muſt conſider every worldly object as trivial, except ſo far as conducive to this great end. While we are in the preſent ſtate, nature requires that we ſhould pay ſome attention to the things of this life; and the requiſitions of nature are inforced by the commands of duty; but every inferior conſideration ſhould be made immediately, or remotely ſubſervient to the ends for which we were created; the glory of God, and the good of our fellow-creatures.

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The ſinner in giving up all which depravity had prized, and folly admired; in relinquiſhing or endeavouring to relinquiſh the unchriſtian principle of pride, acquires the heavenly grace of humility, a grace by which he is prepared to receive the pardon of his ſins, through the atoning merits of his Redeemer. Conſcious that his tranſgreſſions have expoſed him to the puniſhment of divine juſtice, he rejoices to find that God is love, and embraces the offers of mercy, tendered to him, through the goſpel of his Son; and, in addition to all that he has already forſaken, reſigns every ſelf-ſufficient idea of human merit, and preſumes not to claim ſalvation as due to his own performances. Yet he determines, by the divine aſſiſtance, to approve himſelf zealous of good works, as the grateful offering of a heart impreſſed with a ſenſe of divine goodneſs, and with love to God and man.

For the accompliſhment of this holy purpoſe, he hath recourſe to ſecret and earneſt prayer; and having humbly ſolicited

cited the pardon of his ſins, aſks of the Almighty a portion of divine ſtrength, ſufficient to enable him to run the chriſtian race with perſevering alacrity. He intreats his celeſtial parent to enable him to reſiſt temptation with reſolution and ſucceſs; and to be active, and exemplary in every private and ſocial virtue. He riſes from prayer with a mind filled with a ſweet ſerenity before unknown, far different from the occaſional calm of ſenſual ſtupidity, and the wild exhilaration of feveriſh mirth. The joy attendant on religion is temperate and laſting, not leaving behind it that languor which ſucceeds riotous pleaſure, nor ſubject to that ſelf-reproach which follows criminal gratification.

The Chriſtian when ſomewhat advanced in the divine life, no longer conceals the treaſure which he has obtained. He thinks it his duty then to make a profeſſion of religion, in order by his example to incite others to the practice of holineſs. He believes it criminal to aſſume a character which he cannot in his heart approve, and reſo-

reſolutely ſurmounts that unmanly timidity which ariſes from the dread of ridicule. He knows that truth and reaſon powerfully ſupport his cauſe, and neither wiſhes nor fears to meet the enemies of his faith. Should he encounter their idle ſophiſtry, he defends the part he has taken with temperate courage; till the repulſed attacks of infidelity at length are diſcontinued. His becoming deportment and regular life obtain involuntary approbation; and the diſſolute and prophane appear to ſuch diſadvantage, that they ſuffer the diſgrace which they meant to inflict.

He now looks back on his former purſuits with horror and aſtoniſhment; wonders that he could be ſo long deluded by the ſpecious appearance of worthleſs objects; and is ſhocked at the conſequences which muſt have taken place, if he had not through divine Providence been awakened to a ſenſe of his danger, and through divine grace been inclined to ſeek for mercy, and to embrace the joyful offers of ſalvation propounded in the Goſpel.

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Were we to compare all that the Chriſtian gives up in order to obtain the immenſe treaſure of eternal happineſs, the infinite gain which he acquires, would appear in every circumſtance; and thoſe who value themſelves on their dexterity, in improving their wealth and making advantageous purchaſes, would find the imperfection of human ſkill, and the inſignificance of worldly poſſeſſions, compared with that wiſdom which cometh from above, and thoſe riches which are of celeſtial origin.

Whatever we enjoy on earth muſt be of ſhort duration, except that foretaſte of the joys of heaven, which is granted to the pious ſoul. The extent of life, even at its utmoſt length, is limited to narrow bounds; and ſhould our continuance on earth be equal to that of the moſt aged, the weakneſs attendant on years ſo advanced, will leave us little power of enjoyment. But the treaſures of religion are eternal, and unimbittered by that mortifying reflection, ſo afflicting to the worldly mind, that the hour

hour is approaching, which will put a final period to every temporal delight; to the poſſeſſion of riches, and the gratifications of ſenſe.

The acquiſitions which are ſo eagerly purſued, by erring mortals, are not only often worthleſs, but ſometimes pernicious; and thoſe things which, when unpoſſeſſed, wore the moſt inviting appearance, render the poſſeſſor unhappy by injuring his health, or deſtroying his peace of mind; but the value of holineſs is intrinſic, and its effects always ſalutary. Its appearance makes no promiſes, which its reality does not fulfil. Its advantages are found to ſurpaſs expectation, and from its practice, we derive good without the leaſt mixture of evil.

Earthly pleaſures tire, ſatiate, and change their nature by repetition, which renders them inſipid, and at length diſguſtful; but the joys of religion will be for ever new, and our powers of fruition encreaſing to perfection. When admitted hereafter to our full reward, then, immerſed in the ocean

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of divine love and holy rapture, partaking immortal ſtrength communicated by the beatific viſion, our pleaſures will never be exhauſted, nor our powers impaired. The dignity and delights of angels will conſtitute our treaſure, and a boundleſs eternity be the ſeaſon of enjoyment.

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SERMON XVI.

PROV. xxx. 8, 9.

Give me neither Poverty nor Riches; feed me with Food convenient for me; leſt I be full and deny thee, and ſay, Who is the Lord? or leſt I be poor and ſteal, and take the Name of my God in vain.

THE book of Proverbs, in conjunction with that of Eccleſiaſtes, is the moſt valuable collection of ſound maxims that ever appeared; containing ſuch accurate, though detached delineations of the human mind, ſuch clear and inviting diſcoveries of the way to real happineſs, as could only be communicated by inſpiration.

It is now near three thouſand years ſince theſe books were compiled; and the conſiderable

ſiderable revolutions, which ſuch a period muſt have cauſed in language and cuſtoms, added to the difference between the manners and climate of ancient Jeruſalem, and of our age and nation, furniſh a ſufficient reaſon, why ſome few paſſages appear difficult and obſcure. But the general tenor of the whole ſtill exhibits a true picture of the human heart; points out, in moſt caſes, the proper line of conduct; ſtrikingly illuſtrates divine truths; and muſt ever be a valuable treaſure to the ſincere Chriſtian.

If this book were read with the attention that its worth demands, its beauty and energy of expreſſion would charm the admirer of literary excellence; its accuracy of diſtinction, and propriety of thought, delight the real philoſopher, whoſe object is truth; and the importance of the ſubjects fix the attention of every man truly ſenſible of his beſt intereſts.

Among the many excellent paſſages, remarkable for weight of matter and flow of lan-

language, the text before us is not the leaſt conſpicuous. It is a part of the prayer of Agur the ſon of Jakeh, which breathes an air of genuine piety; ſhews a conſiderable knowledge of human life, and diſplays (in an eminent degree) the humility of its author. In order that we may partake of his knowledge, imbibe his ſpirit, and adopt his admirable petition, I ſhall take a ſlight view of the evils of poverty; (which being generally acknowledged, require not much conſideration;) and then enlarge more fully on the evils of riches; from whence will appear the ſafety and advantage attendant on a ſtate of competent mediocrity.

Man is a compound of appetites and paſſions, which, indulged to a certain degree, under the complete dominion of reaſon, would tend to advance his happineſs; but which unreſtrained, produce miſery, in proportion as they deviate from the path of rectitude.

A certain portion of this world's goods is abſolutely neceſſary to our exiſtence, which cannot be comfortable, except what we poſſeſs is adapted to our wants and conveniences; and whoever is deſtitute of this is ſaid to be poor. At a ſtate of extreme poverty human nature ſhudders. All have dreadful apprehenſions of want, though it muſt be confeſſed, that many do not take the beſt methods for its prevention: and it is remarkable, that thoſe, who from their want of induſtry, and unſeaſonable prodigality, might moſt naturally expect, and certainly have merited the evils of indigence, are uſually found leaſt able to ſuſtain them.

When poverty is the conſequence of improper conduct, it is a juſt puniſhment; but when produced by circumſtances, which no human wiſdom could foreſee, nor prudence prevent, it is then a misfortune. It was this ſort of poverty, which Agur deprecated; for a man of his wiſdom could never hope, that the Almighty would ſo

far alter the ſyſtem of his providence, as to permit idleneſs to inherit the bleſſings of induſtry; or ſuppoſe that any one could retain his poſſeſſions, amidſt a culpable and profuſe diſſipation. No: the object of his petition was, exemption from that untoward chain of events, by which the continued and regular efforts of diligence are ſometimes rendered unſucceſsful; and by which the moſt prudent are plunged into a ſtate of want and dependence. The ſeverity of this trial Agur wiſhed to avoid, leſt he might not be able to reſiſt the powerful temptations, that are always its attendants.

Little can they, who are conſtantly fondled in the lap of fortune, judge of the acute feelings of extreme penury. What muſt be the ſenſations of him, who, while he ſees profuſion every where over-ſpread the ſurface of the earth, hath not a ſmall portion which he can call his own; who, while he beholds multitudes of his fellow-creatures deeply immerſed in luxury, is himſelf pining for want of the neceſſaries

of life; who by ſcorn and reproach is driven from his former companions, to the gloomy habitation of his own wretchedneſs?

Though it may excite our cenſure, it cannot raiſe our wonder, if, in this extremity, he ſhould give up his integrity, and uſe force or fraud to procure that, which he has no proſpect otherwiſe of obtaining. This was the dread of Agur; "leſt I be poor and ſteal;" to which he adds, "and take the name of my God in vain."

The taking the name of God in vain, will bear three different conſtructions; firſt, profane ſwearing in common diſcourſe; which I apprehend is not here intended, as it is a vice by no means peculiar to poverty: ſecondly, falſe ſwearing, or denying, by ſolemn imprecation, diſhoneſt actions which we have committed; and as poverty affords a ſtrong temptation to this ſin, it may be comprehended in the text: but the third, and in this place the principal meaning is, to pronounce, with our lips, the

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name of that God, whom in our lives we conſtantly offend.

A ſtate of indigence is by no means a ſtate, in which men forget God; on the contrary, the evils of poverty remind them of his omnipotence, ſhew them the inſignificance of the world, and often induce them to call on the Almighty for aſſiſtance. But this is taking his name in vain, if they do not preſerve their integrity, and reſiſt thoſe temptations to which, by their ſituation, they are expoſed. Thoſe temporary effuſions of the heart in prayer, which are (as it were) wrung from us by the immediate preſſure of affliction, are not the petitions which the Almighty will accept, if unaccompanied by a ſuitable conduct.

This invocation of our Maker from a ſenſe of diſtreſs, without an habitual reverence for his laws; this ſolemn mockery is conſidered by Agur, as too commonly connected with a ſtate of poverty; and as a ſin of awful magnitude, from which he earneſtly wiſhes to be preſerved.

But, from the dreadful effects of poverty, which requires no minute inveſtigation, ſince they are either felt or feared by the majority of mankind, I turn to the evils that await riches; of which men appear not equally ſenſible. To talk of the danger of being rich, if we may judge of opinions by actions, muſt to the generality of people appear abſurd; for there is not, among all ranks, a wiſh ſo prevalent as that of becoming opulent, nor a purſuit in which ſo many are engaged. For this the induſtrious labour, and the indolent languiſh. Yet the ſacred volume of inſpiration we profeſs to venerate; the ſages of antiquity we pretend to admire; and the poets, with whom we feel ourſelves delighted; all concur in ſhewing the inſignificance of riches with reſpect to the advancement of happineſs; all declare the many thorny cares, which they never fail to introduce, and their general tendency to corrupt the mind.

Who is there, but has read and admired numerous paſſages of this deſcription? Yet

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ſo ſtrange is our inconſiſtency, that, approving the theory, we adopt a contrary practice. When the enlightened apoſtle declares money to be the root of all evil, who can deny the juſtice of the poſition, though perhaps himſelf engaged in its immoderate purſuit. When our Saviour forcibly expreſſes the difficulty with which a rich man ſhall enter the kingdom of heaven, who will deny the truth of his aſſertion? Yet, where is the man who acts as if he had any real apprehenſion of danger? ſhall we then, notwithſtanding theſe ſolemn warnings, ſwim with the ſtream, and ſuffer ourſelves to be carried away by the tide of worldly intereſt? or ſhall we check our propenſity to avarice, and conſider wealth, as it really is, inimical to our eternal happineſs, unable to ſecure us from many temporal cares, and productive of many evils from which indigence is exempt?

We muſt be groſsly, or rather perverſely blind, if we perceive not that the rich are obnoxious to many anxieties; liable to have their minds engaged by the loweſt and moſt

groveling ideas; and in danger of ſuffering all the miſeries reſulting from a ſordid diſpoſition. Inſtead of enjoying the eſteem of the good, and the ſociety of the worthy, they, in general, are only ſurrounded by intereſted flatterers, and praiſed by mean dependents.

But overlooking alike the evils and advantages (for advantages, it muſt be confeſſed, there are) attendant on riches, conſidered in a temporal point of view; Agur prays to be delivered from them, as they interfere with his eternal welfare, and tend to make him forget God. The violent paſſions and ſenſual appetites of man, in any ſituation, require reſtraint; and are hindrances in his progreſs to heaven: but he, who has the greateſt means of indulgence, whoſe fortune concurs with the depravity of his nature, muſt aſſuredly find the greateſt difficulty, in keeping them within reaſonable and neceſſary limits. Where ſhall he fly for ſhelter, whoſe own table is a ſnare; or how, in the midſt of luxury, curb his immoderate deſires? Where

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can he, whoſe fortune has obtained an acknowledged ſuperiority over his fellow-creatures, experimentally learn humility? Can he, whom no one dares to remind of his faults, but many flatter with imaginary virtues, ever arrive at a true knowledge of himſelf? Will he, who poſſeſſes much, be among the foremoſt to give up all (ſhould it be required) for Chriſt's ſake? Will he, who enjoys a kind of paradiſe here, eagerly ſeek that future felicity, which is of another ſpecies, and for which tribulation is the moſt effectual preparative?

Though to theſe important enquiries we dare not give an abſolute negative, yet we are authoriſed to ſay, "not many rich are ſeeking the kingdom of God." What numbers, in the higher ranks of life, lay aſide even the forms of religion! Some, not contented with neglecting, attempt to ridicule, and affect to deſpiſe it; till an alarming ſtroke of Providence, or a near proſpect of death, awakes them from their dreadful dream; ſhews them the extreme folly of their conduct; and anticipates the dread-

dreadful ſentence of an almighty and unerring Judge, whoſe laws they have conſtantly diſobeyed.

But even among thoſe in affluent circumſtances, who have not aggravated their crimes by the boaſt of infidelity, nor quite laid aſide religious duties, it ſeldom happens, that divine ſubjects much employ the thoughts, or engage the attention. Serious converſation and pious diſcourſe are not congenial to the variety of temporal indulgences, with which the rich are perpetually ſurrounded. Abundance has a natural tendency to ſtifle ſober thought, and divert the attention, from the important concerns of the ſoul, to thoſe trifles which adorn, pamper, and enervate the body.

But, though reaſon yields her hearty aſſent to theſe obſervations, yet (the reflective hour once paſt) the buſtle of the world again engages us in a purſuit, not always favourable to our temporal, but certainly inimical to our future happineſs. Intereſt, almoſt to a proverb, is eſteemed the moſt pre-

prevailing motive to human actions, yet is not reckoned among the moſt honourable. To account for the general prevalence of a principle ſo deſpiſed, we muſt reflect on the deceptions man too often practiſes on others, and even on himſelf, in calling the objects of his purſuit by improper names, and thus concealing the turpitude of his actions. "A competence is all I deſire," ſays the man, who is eagerly ſtraining every nerve to aggrandize himſelf and family. It therefore becomes neceſſary, if we would undeceive ourſelves, to examine in what competence conſiſts; ſince the purſuit of that is not only allowable but commendable. "Feed me with food convenient for me," ſays the pious Agur, which ſtrictly can mean no more than what is merely ſufficient to ſupport exiſtence. He aſks only for ſuch food as is ſuitable to his nature; which few, in this land of plenty, can be ſuppoſed to want.

Competence, however, in a more extenſive ſenſe, may include thoſe conveniences to which we have been accuſtomed, as it gives

gives us almoſt as much pain to be deprived of habitual indulgences as of abſolute neceſſaries. Yet nothing can be more abſurd than the general cuſtom of calling whatever we wiſh for by that venerable name. Competence is not that which may, but that which ought to ſatisfy us; and he is highly culpable, who, poſſeſſed of not only what the wants of nature require, but of all which he has hitherto been wont to enjoy, is yet anxiouſly ſeeking a greater portion of wealth. Whatever ſpecious pretext he may employ as an apology for his conduct, he is ſeeking additional cares, temptations, and impediments in his way to that heavenly felicity, which, if it be not his chief deſire, he can have no rational hope of obtaining.

If therefore we feel not, on one hand, the preſſure of want, nor, on the other, are encumbered with ſuperfluities, we ſhould be thankful for that ſituation, which the wiſeſt men have eſteemed the ſafeſt and beſt: but ſhould Providence have placed us in neceſſitous circumſtances, it is becoming

coming and neceſſary to bear our diſtreſs with fortitude; ſince "theſe light afflictions," which are but for a moment (if we have faith in the divine promiſes) will work out for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory. If the poor, notwithſtanding their afflictive circumſtances, preſerve their integrity, reſiſting every temptation to diſhoneſty, they may then call on their heavenly father, without danger of taking his name in vain. To them who believe and obey him his ear is ever attentive. He will, in his good time, anſwer their petitions; and all things, however adverſe they may appear at preſent, ſhall work together for their future good.

But, to the rich, how ſhall I addreſs myſelf? Happy indeed are ye, if, as your fortunes encreaſe, your hearts alſo expand; if as you are inveſted with ability, you exerciſe beneficence to your ſuffering brethren; for aſſuredly, it is more bleſſed to give than to receive. Yet how many are there, who reverſe this conduct, leſſen their diſtributions, amidſt encreaſing acquiſitions; who

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are doubly anxious for gain, when it can procure them no advantage, which they did not poſſeſs before! Such perſons, however ſplendid in the eye of the world, are, to the reflecting mind, more the objects of pity than of envy. What can be more ſhocking than the caſe of the young man in the Goſpel, who, enquiring of our Lord what he ſhould do to be ſaved, was willing to ſubmit to the external obſervance of the law, but, at the ſaying, "ſell all that thou haſt, and give to the poor," went away ſorrowing, for he had great poſſeſſions?

Awful indeed is the ſituation of that man, who deliberately prefers earth to heaven; and, for the rubbiſh of a periſhing world, loſes his heavenly, incorruptible inheritance!

May it be our aim, whether poſſeſſing wealth, or ſuffering penury, to obtain every ſpiritual advantage which our ſtate affords, and reſiſt thoſe temptations with which it is attended

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Competence is certainly beſt calculated for our ſecurity, and moſt agreeable to rational deſire; but indigence and opulence are extremes we may be called to endure; and then if we are ſenſible of our danger, and ſeek divine aſſiſtance, we may avoid the evils of either blaſpheming or forgetting God. By a proper conduct all our trials may be rendered improvements of our virtue. Infinite wiſdom has allotted to each of us, that ſtate beſt calculated for our ultimate advantage. Be it ours to ſecond the gracious deſigns of Providence, by reſignation in poverty, moderation in riches, or content in mediocrity. To this end let us implore the aſſiſtance of the holy ſpirit, which may enable us to riſe ſuperior to our various temptations, to enjoy with thankfulneſs our reſpective bleſſings, and to acquieſce in the propriety and benignity of the divine diſpenſations.

SERMON XVII.

ROM. vi. 9.

Death hath no more Dominion over him.

THE firm belief of a future exiſtence is eſſential to religion. Whatever may be the conduct or opinions of men, if they be not fully perſuaded of the immortality of the ſoul, they have no true divinity, even in theory. But ſhould they profeſs themſelves believers in this important truth, and ſubſcribe to the ſoundeſt doctrinal ſyſtem, yet if they do not act under the influence of faith, and conſider themſelves as temporary probationers for eternity, they are not entitled to the character of practical Chriſtians.

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The firm belief of an hereafter, is the moſt powerful motive to virtue, that can pervade the human breaſt. The ideas of reward and puniſhment, in any mode or degree, ſeldom fail of ſome effect, as they immediately apply to the primary paſſions of hope and fear; but if reward and puniſhment are contemplated, as without meaſure in their nature, and without limit in their duration, what intelligent being can withſtand their operation?

The ſtupendous fabric of the univerſe, and the wonderful mechaniſm of our own frame, loudly proclaim the exiſtence of Deity, and are indiſputable evidences of divine wiſdom and power; and the reflections of natural reaſon on the admirable tendency of the viſible creation to promote the happineſs of man, will ſoon incline us to believe, that goodneſs is included in the attributes of the infinite Creator. From ſuch a reflection we ſhall be naturally led to infer, that God will ever govern the ſyſtem he has formed; and that thoſe who concur with his plan, and fulfil

his benevolent deſign, will be rewarded with a greater portion of felicity; while thoſe who reſiſt his will, juſtly forfeit their title to all his bleſſings.

Upon theſe efforts of human underſtanding, were founded the ancient principles of morality, and the early diſtinction of virtue and vice, among thoſe who enjoyed not the advantage of revelation. But the heathen philoſophers, having no clear idea of a future ſtate, haſtily concluded, that virtue and happineſs were, even in this life, inſeparably connected; and that vice and miſery were never divided. Conſiderable ſucceſs in worldly undertakings, was beheld as an indiſputable evidence of goodneſs, and an uncommon portion of affliction was eſteemed an infallible proof of atrocious guilt.

So ſtrongly were the minds of men impreſſed with theſe ideas, by the vague reaſonings of unenlightened nature, that they were not eaſily removed, even by the aſſiſtance of revelation. When David ſaw the

the wicked proſper, he was for a time ſtaggered: when he beheld, on the one hand, the exuberance of their health, the plenty of their poſſeſſions, and the peace of their habitations; and on the other, the hardneſs of their hearts, and the iniquity of their lives, he was confounded; and could not reconcile the exiſtence of ſuch facts with the prevailing notions of immediate divine juſtice. That God ſhould be juſt, and that evil ſhould flouriſh with impunity, he could not underſtand, till he connected time with eternity; till his penetration pierced the veil of mortality, and contemplated the retribution that ſhould take place in another ſtate.

The ſame ideas of immediate rewards annexed to virtue, and inſtantaneous puniſhments inflicted on vice, were prevalent in the days of our Saviour; ſince the Galileans, whoſe blood Pilate mingled with their ſacrifices; and the eighteen, on whom the tower of Siloam fell, were conſidered as guilty of ſome atrocious crimes, which had called down the vengeance of heaven.

But theſe erroneous opinions our Lord reproves, that they might not imagine themſelves pure and blameleſs, becauſe they enjoyed the temporal ſmiles of Providence; "except ye repent," ſays he, "ye ſhall all likewiſe periſh." Indeed the moſt ſagacious among the heathens ſaw ſuch evident diſproportion between the actions and ſucceſs of men, as diſconcerted them in the concluſions drawn from their ſyſtem; ſo that, at one time, they were led to doubt, and even to deny the ſuperintendence of a Deity; and at another, to place happineſs in ſituations repugnant to the feelings of nature. In order to encourage men in virtuous perſeverance, when they could not promiſe them temporal eaſe and enjoyment in proportion to their integrity, they placed the reward of virtue in an empty ſound. Public honours after death were decreed in memory of thoſe, who had diſtinguiſhed themſelves by their exemplary conduct; and to have a name engraven on braſs, and exhibited to poſterity, was eſteemed an ample recompenſe for the moſt painful ſufferings.

Theſe

Theſe poſthumous diſtinctions might operate on the expectations of thoſe, whoſe boſoms ſwelled with imaginary notions of honour, but were not adapted to general influence. The multitude, who could not enter into ſuch refined ſpeculations, were left to the government of ſelf-intereſt, and, for the moſt part, followed that line of conduct, which tended to gratify their paſſions, and indulge their propenſities. The morality of the heathen philoſophers therefore was vague and imperfect, wholly deſtitute of any powerful motive to enſure its practice: their beſt ſyſtems were only refined modes of ſelf-intereſt, inadequate to produce purity of heart, peace of mind, and uniformity of conduct. To retort an inſult with aſperity, was eſteemed nobleneſs of ſpirit; and to revenge an injury was an act of juſtice. Such a conduct, though by the ignorance of men denominated equity, muſt give riſe to endleſs contention and perpetual animoſity.

To eradicate ſuch erroneous principles, and call mankind to the purſuit of harmo-

ny and holineſs, the will of God was communicated by revelation. By divine tuition men were made acquainted with their true nature and ſituation; the veil of futurity was drawn, and the light of truth poured upon the human mind. The certain retribution of a future ſtate was diſcovered, and the means of acquiring unadulterated happineſs, and eſcaping inexpreſſible miſery, were graciouſly communicated. To convince them of ſin, and acquaint them with their unfitneſs for the enjoyment of the divine preſence, as well as to regulate their lives, the law was promulgated; and to prevent their deſpair of obtaining the favour of God, from their inability perfectly to fulfil its precepts, the promiſes were afforded; a ſincere repentance, a ſteady faith, and a well-intended though incomplete obedience, were favoured with the hope of certain acceptance. An adequate and all-ſufficient Saviour was predicted, who ſhould remove every impediment, fulfil every requiſition, and put the righteous in poſſeſſion of eternal bliſs. In a beautiful and perfect chain of prophecies, the divinity of his perſon,

perſon, the extent of his character, and the nature of his offices, were by degrees unfolded.

Yet, through the ignorance and obſtinacy of men, through their unpardonable neglect, in not cloſely following that divine clue, given to lead them into all truth, they were ſtill enveloped in darkneſs little ſhort of heatheniſh; they were dead to ſpiritual, and abſorbed in earthly things. In proportion as their ideas of eternity were weak and confuſed, their attachment to temporal objects prevailed: by the darkneſs of their minds, and the depravity of their deſires, the word of God was miſinterpreted, and the promiſed bleſſings beheld in a falſe point of view. But though the Jews groſsly abuſed the mercies of God, they could not alter their nature, nor prevent their effect. The prophecies, founded on eternal truth, depend not, for their completion, on capricious men. At the appointed time, the Saviour of the world brought life and immortality to light; and, to the confuſion of carnal expectation, eſtabliſhed a ſpiritual

kingdom; treated with juſt contempt the honours, dignities, and riches of the world, and directed the attention of his followers to a higher inheritance.

The ſpotleſs ſimplicity of his life, the holy ſublimity of his doctrine, the unſhaken fortitude with which he bore the moſt excruciating ſufferings, were, one would think, when beheld with a true ſpirit, ſufficient to convert men from the error of their ways, and induce them to "lay hold of the hope ſet before them;" not for himſelf, but for us, and for our ſalvation, he came down from heaven; and the merciful condeſcenſion of our bleſſed Redeemer went ſo far, that he eſteemed it not enough to purchaſe for us the treaſure of eternal life, and invite us to accept it, by the moſt encouraging promiſes of aſſiſtance and ſucceſs; but that we might have no pretence to doubt his word, and to evince that his power equaled his inclination to ſave us, he gave a viſible and indiſputable proof of our future exiſtence, by his own triumph over the grave. The ſhepherd was indeed

ſmitten,

ſmitten, and the ſheep ſcattered; but he was the eternal ſhepherd of Iſrael; who had not only power to lay down his life, but had alſo power to take it again; who having fulfilled all righteouſneſs, and having ſubmitted to the ignominy of death, completed his work by triumphing over the grave. After his body had been depoſited in the tomb, on the third day, amid the convulſions of nature, the Lord of glory burſt the bars of death, and proclaimed his eternal victory to his faithful and expecting diſciples.

His unſpotted character, his heavenly precepts, his meritorious ſufferings, correſponding with ancient prophecy, were all neceſſary and noble parts of the divine plan of redemption; but his reſurrection was the key-ſtone that completed the ſacred arch. That alone could diſſipate the doubts of his deſponding diſciples, and ſubſtantiate poſſibility to reality. They now ſaw the gate of futurity opened, and beheld their Saviour as the firſt fruits of immortality. They thus became ſuperior to the combined force

force of all their enemies, who were unable either by menaces or allurements to bias their integrity. The full certainty and near proſpect of the heavenly manſion, which he had prepared for their reception, extinguiſhed the faint luſtre of temporal excellence, and diſſipated the gloom of temporal death. They ſaw that though, through the curſe annexed to a ſinful nature, they muſt ſubmit to the dominion of the king of terrors, yet his reign would be but ſhort; that he muſt reſign what he held, and they ſhould then be inhabitants of thoſe celeſtial regions, to which their Saviour had led the way.

In this does the miſſion of our Redeemer materially differ from that of Moſes, and riſe far ſuperior to thoſe divine manifeſtations conveyed to us by the prophets. They, according to the gifts with which they were honoured, revealed to mankind a part of the will of God; exhorted them to repentance, and pointed to the means of ſalvation. He was himſelf the eternal word, the way, the truth, and the life: he not only

only preached the kingdom of heaven, but opened a paſſage to the celeſtial abodes. While the minds of the prophets were illuminated by the Holy Spirit, their bodies remained corrupt and mortal, and were not only ſubject to the ſtroke, but continued under the power of death. In the Meſſiah reſided the fulneſs of the Godhead bodily: he triumphed over corruption, even with reſpect to his corporeal frame, and exhibited a living and viſible example of immortality.

But if we behold the reſurrection of Chriſt only as a wonderful diſplay of divine power, in which we are not comprehended; if while we view it as a miraculous inſtance of the dignity of Chriſt's perſon, and the myſtery of his nature, we enter not into the intention of our merciful Redeemer in the aſtoniſhing exhibition; if we are ignorant of his deſign to evince the immortality of our ſouls, and the actual reſurrection of our bodies, we neglect the grand and important end of this glo-

rious event, and are ſhamefully inattentive to our own comfort and advantage.

Chriſt was the fœderal head of his people; what he performed was therefore for their benefit; and in his victory over death and his aſcenſion to heaven, he clearly exemplified their future condition. The ſalvation of man being now complete, the Almighty condeſcended to obviate every doubt, by ſeveral additional exhibitions of divine power, which, though leſs ſplendid, were more accommodated to human weakneſs. For when Chriſt (who in his reſurrection was the firſt-born of many brethren) had forſaken the gloomy manſion of the ſepulchre, though the time was not come for the conſummation of all things, yet, as a proof that the chain of death was broken, and that already the bodies of men were become ſuſceptible of reſtoration, many were actually reſtored; for we read that the graves were opened, and many bodies of the ſaints which ſlept aroſe, and came out of their graves, after the reſurrection,

rection, and went into the holy city, and appeared to many.

This is at once a remarkable and an encouraging paſſage. Theſe departed mortals had not, like our Redeemer, any ſuperior nature of their own, by which they, more than ourſelves, could vivify their corrupted frame, and, from an inanimate ſtate, ſtart into new life and motion: it is therefore the plaineſt of all reaſoning, that, as they were mere mortals, ſunk in the darkneſs and ſilence of the grave, what has been done in their caſe may be accompliſhed with reſpect to us. As we ſtand preciſely in their ſituation, as to our mortality, we may expect the fulfilment of thoſe promiſes, which in them have already been accompliſhed.

But we may obſerve, that the bodies of ſaints only were thus appointed to be immediate attendants on our Lord, in his glorious triumph; and that it was after his reſurrection that they were re-animated. Here we may diſcern the neceſſity of holi-

neſs,

neſs, in order to enjoy the ſpiritual diſtinction of mercy, and behold how clearly the order of divine things was preſerved, and that, as St. Paul expreſſes it, "Chriſt was the firſt fruits, then they that were Chriſt's."

The reſurrection of the dead is the characteriſtic feature of chriſtianity. Any ſyſtem which eſtabliſhes not the reality of eternal things, though founded on the pureſt moral precepts, or moſt exalted notions of Deity, can only produce a partial reform, or delight the mind with a beautiful theory; but cannot change the heart, nor renovate the diſpoſition. Mere morality is greatly reſtricted in its advantages, ſince, while it inſpires the minds of men with elevated ſentiments, and yet leaves them diſconſolate for want of the proſpect of a better ſtate, it ſuſpends them, as it were, between two worlds, giving them a diſtaſte for earthly enjoyments, and yet no certainty of heavenly bleſſings.

The

The wiſeſt among the ancient philoſophers talk of a future ſtate as a thing rather deſirable than ſure; as a deluſion of a pleaſing nature, in which they had no inclination to be undeceived. It was reſerved for the glorious Redeemer of mankind to bring life and immortality to light, to emerge from the dreary regions of the dead, and diſpel the miſgivings of his faithful followers; and we ſee in their immediate change of conduct, an effect worthy of the cauſe. Before his crucifixion, they were full of human infirmity, and weak in faith; even Peter, who had been witneſs to ſo many miracles, and had heard with profound attention the doctrines of ſalvation from the lips of incarnate Deity, whoſe affection muſt have been ſtrongly engaged by the amiable deportment of his divine maſter, and who, on ſeveral occaſions, manifeſted that he tenderly loved Jeſus, yet could not ſummon reſolution to own him, through dread of ſuffering with him.

The reſt of his diſciples, though they revered his character, and were ſtrongly attached to his perſon, yet deſerted him in his diſtreſs, and had not confidence to approach him and own him during his dreadful ſufferings. But, after his reſurrection, they were filled with holy boldneſs, and were ſtrangers to unbelieving fear; they could face dangers and defy death; they could cheerfully labour through all difficulties, and, regardleſs of the malice and cruelty of their enemies, preach that goſpel, in the belief of which they were now perfectly eſtabliſhed. Animated with the clear and delightful proſpect of eternal felicity, they were not only emancipated from the fear of death, but anxiouſly waited for the hour of diſſolution. "It is better for me," ſays St. Paul, "to be diſſolved, and to be with Chriſt."

But even the doctrine of the reſurrection cannot be conſolatory to the wicked; for though at the laſt day all, as the ſcripture declares, ſhall come forth, yet the wicked

ſhall

ſhall come forth to the reſurrection of condemnation, and only the righteous to the reſurrection of everlaſting life. Therefore as Chriſt died unto the world, we muſt die unto ſin; we muſt follow our bleſſed Redeemer in faith and obedience, if we expect to riſe with him in glory. Nor will the profeſſion of Chriſtianity avail us, if we act in a manner inconſiſtent with evangelic purity: for as the cleareſt prophecies were neglected or miſunderſtood by the inattentive among the ancient Iſraelites, ſo the brighteſt evidence of their fulfilment will not ſhine in the eyes of thoſe who are ſunk in groſſneſs and ſenſuality; nor adminiſter comfort to the votaries of vanity and vice.

To thoſe only, who earneſtly ſeek ſalvation, and reſolutely wreſtle with ſin, the death and reſurrection of our Lord can afford effectual advantage; ſupporting them in their trials, comforting them in their afflictions, and giving them a clear view of their own future exiſtence. The contem-

plation of that glorious event, by which death and the powers of darkneſs were ſubdued, will ever be accompanied with an idea of the fitneſs they muſt acquire in this world to be a partaker of the bleſſing in the next.

Indeed, a conſtant recollection of the immortality of the ſoul, and a genuine purity of heart, operate reciprocally as cauſe and effect in the ſupport of each other, and generally riſe or fall together. If we deviate into groſs and immoral conduct, the reſurrection of the ſaints to happineſs can be no comfortable doctrine to us; it is then a point in which we are not intereſted, and conſequently ſhall not be ſolicitous to examine or cultivate; abſorbed in preſent concerns, and amuſed by the phantoms of pleaſure dancing around us, the principles of religion muſt grow fainter and fainter, till their utter extinction ſhall leave the mind in the gloom of doubt, and, at the removal of our tranſient enjoyments, reſign it a prey to inconceivable deſpair. But if we aim, by an increaſing conformity

to

to the eminent example of our Lord, to become his eternal attendants; we ſhall examine with activity and joy the evidences of our faith, perceive them daily brighten to our view, till they inſpire our breaſts with hopes full of immortality.

SERMON XVIII.

PSALM lxxxiv. 11.

For the Lord is a Sun and Shield: the Lord will give Grace and Glory: no good Thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly.

THIS, though a brief, is a juſt and beautiful deſcription of the great benefits of religion; it is explanatory both of its nature and excellence; and is highly expreſſive of the holy feeling, the pious warmth, and ſpiritual joy which inſpired the ſacred writer of this pſalm.

In the beginning of the compoſition, he breaks out into an ardent admiration of divine inſtitutions; "How amiable are thy tabernacles O Lord of Hoſts," and then, fervently

fervently longing for a nearer communication with the divine author, runs over with encreaſing ardor, a number of particulars, which confirm his confidence, excite his gratitude, and enliven his devotion. He proceeds by adopting with wonderful animation, the ſtriking metaphors of ſun and ſhield: the one a ſplendid image of life and happineſs, the other a complete emblem of protection. But to ſhew that he was not only actuated by the fire of zeal, but ſupported by the calmneſs of reaſon; he drops the figure, and repeats the ſame ſentiment in plain though exalted terms, "the Lord will give grace and glory," and in the midſt of his ardor forgets not the character which they muſt ſuſtain, who are in the poſſeſſion of this felicity. "No good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly."

This ſublime paſſage, highly animating in its language, and wonderfully correct in its expreſſion, preſents us with three important particulars.

I. It implies, that man is deſtitute by nature, both of protection and felicity; that he hath need of a ſun and ſhield.

II. That God only can become both the one and the other; that he only can give grace and glory.

III. The deſcription of perſons whom he will protect and bleſs, "that he will withhold no good thing from them who walk uprightly."

I. It implies that man, by nature, is deſtitute of protection and felicity. This is a fundamental truth in religion; but a truth with which many are wholly unacquainted, and which many more receive in too limited and partial an acceptation.

The ignorance of mankind is in nothing more conſpicuous than in their inſenſibility to their own wants; they are ſurrounded by dangers which they do not perceive, and conſequently are not anxious to avoid.

Their

Their ſtupidity in this reſpect is often ſo great, that experience affords her inſtructive leſſons in vain; though diſtreſs and diſappointment have hitherto met them in every ſtep, yet they vainly hope to find a path free from evils. In this wilderneſs of woe, they have drank of many a bitter draught, and yet are weak enough to imagine, that their future cup ſhall be unmingled with miſery. What infatuation to truſt again when they have ſo often been deceived; what blindneſs to ſuppoſe that happineſs which has hitherto eluded their purſuit, waits to embrace them at the next ſtep. We may conſume our time and exhauſt our ſtrength in the enquiry, "Who will ſhew us any good?" but as long as we confine our views to earth, the ſame diſguſt and diſappointment will be the reſult of all our labour. As well might we ſeek repoſe on the ſhifting billows of the reſtleſs ocean, as expect a permanent reſt amidſt the ceaſeleſs fluctuations of human affairs. Mankind err becauſe they know not the ſcriptures and the power of God. For we find there, that the gifts of the

Almighty are of two kinds, temporal and ſpiritual. His temporal gifts conſiſt of thoſe things which ſupply the wants incident to our frame; which gratify the appetites and indulge the paſſions; but which, in their utmoſt plenitude and higheſt perfection, are not accommodated to fill the mind, or ſatisfy the ſoul; and therefore they are utterly inadequate to inſure peace, or obtain felicity.

To prove this, ſuppoſe a worldly man in his beſt eſtate and moſt flouriſhing condition; accumulate around him whatever temporal advantages are moſt analogous to his wiſhes; let honour, riches, or pleaſure, take any form, or be conferred in any meaſure; if beauty of perſon, gaiety of diſpoſition, an affectionate wife, lovely and dutiful children, plenitude of power, and extenſive poſſeſſions be deemed neceſſary, let them not be wanting; let imagination put forth her boldeſt wing in queſt of new delights, and when all that deſire can encompaſs is got together, then let us coolly examine the amount; let us once ſubmit the collected

lected maſs to the teſt of reaſon, and we ſhall ſoon find that it will ſhrink to nothing.

In the firſt place, approach ye powerful, to whoſe abſolute ſway the wideſt dominions are ſubject; ſay, is it not one of your cares (and often a bitter ingredient which poiſons the whole draught) that ye muſt appoint a ſucceſſor? Will the orders you iſſue to others, though they are binding upon millions, compenſate for the obedience which, in your corporeal debility, ye are neceſſitated to yield to the doctor or the nurſe? While your name is ſounded by multitudes, do not a thouſand weakneſſes remind you of individual inſignificance? Can ye for a moment envy even a Cæſar or an Alexander, when to their exaltation ye annex their fall? Are ye dazzled with the blaze of glory that ſhone around them? Turn to the pointed ſteel and the infected cup. The dread of their name, or the ſucceſs of their arms, rendered them not invulnerable to the attack of enemies, or the ſtroke of death. Behold them, in the midſt of their career,

career, recede from command, and expire in agonies!

And now, ye envied poſſeſſors of private wealth, who preſume not to claim, but think that ye can purchaſe all that ye deſire, let us examine the ſtate of your account. Can you dare to call the riches which you poſſeſs, in the full ſenſe of the word, your own? Do ye boaſt of ample and unincumbered freeholds? Alas! the very terms of your will prove that your whole right in them may be ſhorter than the moſt inſignificant leaſe. If ye are inſenſible of the brittle tenure by which you occupy; aſk the hungry legatees why they are tortured with anxiety while the teſtament remains unſigned;—"Should he die in the interim" is the diſmal apprehenſion that alarms them. And can you reſt on the falſe ſecurity of future years, while the intereſted around you conſider your life not only as liable, but likely to terminate with the next breath? How ſoon may the fortune you now enjoy be a ſubject of litigation

gation among others, while you yourſelf are almoſt expunged from their thoughts, and by your ſituation in the grave become too contemptible to be ſummoned as an evidence? Should a ſtrength of conſtitution long defer ſuch an event, another, not more pleaſant or ſatisfactory, may take place. You may exiſt amidſt a plenty which you cannot taſte; be guarded by favoured relatives leſt you commit an act of folly; be compelled to receive their commands in the ſhape of advice; and have the mortification to know, that you are beheld only as an incumbrance upon the eſtate.

Ye paragons of beauty, paſs next in review. Are you delighted with the reſpect that every where greets your arrival; or the flattery conſtantly laviſhed on your charms? Alas! how ſoon muſt art be called in to ſupply the defects of nature! The world ſcarcely affords an image adequate to exemplify the brittle texture of beauty, or the ſhortneſs of its duration: it often flouriſhes and fades in a ſeaſon; and then every attempt

attempt to recal attention is ineffectual. The bow of ſubmiſſion is withheld, the voice of adulation is ſilent, the triumphs of ſuperiority are over; and in their room the chilling countenance of neglect, the ſaucy banter of ridicule, and the ſtern viſage of diſguſt are ready to approach.

But there are thoſe whoſe hearts are better formed, and whoſe deſires are more rational; who aſpire not to eminent diſtinction, and who think abundance pays not the toil of accumulation. Their hearts, ſuperior to low deſire and ſordid purſuits, pant for peace and moderate enjoyment. Social intercourſe and return of affection is their conſtant wiſh; and they are equally deſirous to deſerve, as to gain a friend. But ſuch, however amiable their intentions, and however ſpecious their requiſitions, build below the ſkies, and conſequently muſt inherit diſappointment. Suppoſe in their fortuitous connexions they meet with the return of pure and warm affection, and beſtow and enjoy reciprocal tenderneſs.

tenderneſs. It is true, they taſte of a cup ſuperior to that which the opulent can purchaſe, or the moſt abject ſlave can mingle for his haughty lord; but it would be abuſing terms to call it felicity, for the moſt eſſential ingredient is yet wanting. The bond of the union is not eternal, and the threat of ſeparation often alarms them in the midſt of enjoyment. When it comes, they may not be racked with the keen pang of remorſe, to which the rich and great are frequently obnoxious; but they will be inconſolable; the recollection of a tender and diſintereſted attachment will ſink them in deſpair. They will caſt a melancholy look upon an impoveriſhed world, incapable of repairing their recent loſs.

From the defects inherent in all temporal bleſſings, and their inevitable iſſue in annihilation, ariſe their inſignificance and inſufficiency: therefore they who reſt in the things of this life, whatever their ſucceſs or ſituation, may in a moment be reduced to acknowledge, that they have loſt

their

their all; an avowal that ſpeaks their miſery to be complete.

This may be a melancholy, but it is a true deſcription of the beſt poſſeſſions, and the higheſt attainments ſhort of ſpiritual and eternal bliſs. A gloomy ſhade will ſhortly involve the brighteſt earthly proſpects; an abyſs will ſoon be opened, into which all our boaſted delights muſt ſink. Thus are the ſcriptures true that declare man in a ſtate of nature as blind and naked, poor and miſerable. But the ſame ſacred light that diſcovers the diſeaſe, exhibits the remedy. For though man in himſelf is weak, the Almighty hath offered him help; though the delights of nature are fading around us, the glories of heaven are unfolding to our view; for,

II. "God is a ſun and ſhield; he will give grace and glory."

God is indeed the author of every bleſſing; for all things were created and are

ſuſtained

ſuſtained by his power. But thoſe things are with propriety peculiarly termed his gifts, which are of a ſpiritual kind; ſuch as the means of grace, by which the underſtanding is enlightened; the will rectified; the paſſions ſubdued; and the whole man recovered to his primitive capacity for pure and laſting enjoyment. Theſe are conſidered as the more immediate gifts of God, becauſe God is more diſcerned and acknowledged in the reception. Thoſe who forget, or even deny him, are equally cheered by the ſolar ray, or enriched by the fertilizing ſhower. But to enjoy the means of grace ſuppoſes not only a knowledge of God, but a kind of communication with him. To enjoy rationally and permanently all the gifts of the Almighty, we muſt begin with the enjoyment of himſelf.—The enjoyment of God!—Lofty expreſſion!—ſublime idea!—To the world it may be unintelligible, but nevertheleſs it conſtitutes the experience of a Chriſtian; for "he manifeſts himſelf to his diſciples, as he does not unto the world;" that is, ſuch

ſuch clear and comfortable ideas of his nature and dealings are entertained by thoſe who have made ſome progreſs in the divine life, as are wholly incompatible with the notions and feelings of the ſinful and irreligious. Not that any are excluded by a fatal and unalterable decree; but only that the previous preparations of repentance and faith are neceſſary to qualify them for the reception of theſe ſuperior bleſſings. The firſt operations of religion, though they conduce to the ſame end, are in their immediate effects oppoſite to the latter; "I "wound and I heal," ſaith the Almighty. Pride muſt undergo a painful mortification in acquiring ſelf-abaſement; but the humble will experience real joy in their exaltation. None can be raiſed and comforted with the communication of pardon, but thoſe who are ſenſible of the guilt, and dread the puniſhment of their offences. And before the ſuperior enjoyment of a higher and ſpiritual ſtate can be deſired, the complete vanity of natural things muſt be felt. And indeed the text ſeems to be

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directed to thoſe in this middle claſs with reſpect to their religious progreſs. For, if any do not agree to the ſentiments delivered under the firſt head, to them the following will be of little ſervice. But in the hope, that, at leaſt in ſome degree, what has been advanced is corroborated by your own feelings; I ſhall go on to point out how God may be enjoyed as a Sun and Shield.

If we behold the Almighty as the univerſal ſource of all things, it follows, that, whatever may be the ſtate in which *we* are, there is no deficiency in *him*; if we are perſuaded of his power, it cannot be ſaid, "there is no balm in Gilead;" the queſtion then will be, how we may become partakers: but when we are equally convinced of the exiſtence of his goodneſs, and that "his tender mercies are over all his works;" it will ſuggeſt a hope that we, notwithſtanding our preſent ſituation be unfavourable, may at length come within the verge of his gracious communications.

For why ſhould we eſteem ourſelves precluded; or likely to be neglected in the general diſtribution? This, it is true, at moſt is but a negative proof, and if our preſent condition be uncomfortable, it does not aſcertain when and to what degree it may be relieved. But, upon farther inſpection, if we diſcern more of the wiſdom of God; if we can perceive ſomething of that order which pervades the whole economy of his diſpenſations; we ſhall have an additional clue to direct our enquiry. The queſtion will then be, not are we now happy? but are we in the path that tends to it? And if, upon a ſubſequent inveſtigation, we have reaſon to conclude, that our preſent ſtate is calculated to terminate in our approach nearer to felicity, the comfort of hope is brought home to our boſoms, the beams of future enjoyment may be then ſaid to reach us.

Thus God (by our apprehenſion of his attributes, which is the only medium of enjoyment) becomes a ſun to warm and illuminate.

illuminate. And, leſt we might have fears that enemies from within or enemies from without may intervene, and remove us from the feeling of peace and the proſpect of felicity, the ſame attributes that bleſs, are engaged to defend us. God is not like the natural ſun, circumſcribed by laws, and ſubject to interception. His light is in himſelf, and cannot be impeded. It is not all the powers of nature that can prevent his influence. The natural world was created to facilitate, and not to obſtruct his deſigns. Even death, the formidable enemy of ſinful man, the arbiter of human delights, though he can undermine power, extinguiſh beauty, and beggar opulence; is impotent and unavailing when he attacks our ſpiritual bleſſings. To thoſe who live not to the fleſh he can do no injury; if continued approaches to purity have been their exerciſe and their gratification, they can reſign their inferior part to diſſolution; reflecting that the everlaſting arms are around and beneath them.

Thus God is not only their ſun to cheer and enlighten, but their ſhield to defend them againſt all attacks. He is "the ſame yeſterday, to-day, and for ever;" and "neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things preſent, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, ſhall be able to ſeparate us from the love of God, which is in Chriſt Jeſus our Lord." But,

III. We have a deſcription of the perſons whom he will protect and bleſs. "No good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly."

The wiſdom of God appears in nothing more conſpicuous, than in the order that reigns throughout all his works. Even in the natural world there appears ſo much ſuitableneſs and regularity, as warrants us in concluding, that an univerſal fitneſs pervades the whole. And in the moral world, which is our chief concern, we are favoured with

with an equal manifeſtation that divine order is the baſis of the whole fabric.

The ſacred word informs us that innocence alone can enjoy peace; that goodneſs only can be coupled with felicity. It is only a virtuous conduct can be conſiſtent; and it is only conſiſtency can poſſeſs ſecurity. As we riſe in virtue, we advance to bliſs; for univerſal love would be univerſal happineſs. It is from them only who walk uprightly that God will withhold no good thing.

To walk uprightly, is a term frequently uſed in ſcripture to denote that degree of rectitude, and that diſtance from the love and practice of ſin, which even in this world we may attain. Abſolute perfection and conſtant purity is beyond our reach; and therefore we have promiſes of pardon, to relieve us from the fear and anxiety, which otherwiſe a conſciouſneſs of our continual infirmities muſt occaſion. God is not extreme to mark againſt us what we have

done amiſs, for he remembereth that we are but duſt.

But notwithſtanding our depravity, there is a rectification of mind within our power, and which it is our duty to attain; ſubmiſſion to God may be a continual and prevailing principle, and at leaſt an earneſt endeavour to comply with his commands, may be a conſtant employment. When convinced of the evil of ſin, and acquainted with the unceaſing temptations of the world, the mind, if not immediately able to overcome them, may be perpetually on its guard, and maintain a continued conflict. Depraved diſpoſitions, if they baffle our efforts at once to eradicate, may yet be checked; and, weakened by the want of indulgence, may at laſt ceaſe to torment.

Nor is this, though a conſtant labour, either an irkſome taſk, or a painful duty. If we really know that God is the centre of all excellence; if we ſee the inſeparable connexion between purity and happineſs;

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we ſhall ſtrive to be more and more holy and upright, from a conviction, that every attainment therein is an approach to bliſs; that in avoiding ſin we are departing from miſery.

For the very order of things muſt be inverted, the nature of God muſt be changed, before the wicked can be capable of enjoying laſting happineſs. The Chriſtian, therefore, in endeavouring to walk uprightly, does not conſider that he is ſacrificing any thing valuable, and on that account entitled to reward; but he is encouraged as he feels himſelf happier; for the path of duty is the path of peace; and ſubmiſſion to the will of God is an acceptance of a divine bleſſing. From ſuch will our God withhold no good thing. The ſufferings of Chriſtians, and their trials in this world, are in no oppoſition to this truth; theſe, when connected with the effects they are calculated to produce, may juſtly be termed good; for "tribulation worketh patience, and patience experience,

and experience hope." Both the meaſure and nature of their afflictions are accommodated to the end for which they are permitted, and thoſe "light afflictions, which are but for a moment, will work out for them an exceeding and eternal weight of glory."

Whoever, in his eſtimate of things, does not connect time with eternity, can be no judge of good or evil in the ſcripture acceptation. There, our view is carried forward to the conſummation of all things; and this world beheld only as a ſtate of probation, and not enjoyment. Many things the ignorant call good, God beſtows not, becauſe they are real evils. To enlighten the mind with divine knowledge, to purify the heart for the reception of bliſs, is the work of Religion; and inſtruction, affliction, and encouragements, are all various inſtruments neceſſary for its accompliſhment. If with this view of things we look to God, he will indeed be a ſun; if we only dread as evils what may interfere with theſe

operations,

operations, we may diſmiſs our anxiety, for God will be a ſhield. He will afford all things neceſſary for progreſs and protection; and we ſhall go on from ſtrength to ſtrength till we appear before God in Zion.

SER-

SERMON XIX.

MATT. v. 4.

Bleſſed are they that mourn, for they ſhall be comforted.

HOW different this from the language of the world! Captivated by the ſhort-lived mirth which the prophet compares with the crackling of thorns under a pot, they are ready to exclaim, Happy are the gay and the cheerful! Eager in the purſuit of whatever elates the heart and delights the ſenſes, they turn with diſguſt from the appearance of ſolemnity and gloom; and often look upon ſerious thought as the forerunner of melancholy, and melancholy as the completion of miſery. But in the nature of things, and in the eſtimation of the

the wiſe, "the houſe of mourning (for a pilgrim in this world) is better than the houſe of feaſting."

The Jews expected, when the Meſſiah appeared, that he would immediately bleſs them with dignity and independence; that he would hail them as the favourites of heaven, and ſeat them upon thrones of terreſtrial power. But his thoughts were not as their thoughts, nor his ways as their ways. His coming was not to gratify their pride, but to remove their ſins; not to put them in poſſeſſion of temporal, but to procure them ſpiritual bleſſings. And, in conformity to this more noble and benevolent deſign, he began to prepare them for immortal happineſs, by ſhewing them their real ſituation, unfolding in the cleareſt manner the merciful diſpoſition of his Father towards them, and endeavouring to reconcile them to God.

He, therefore, knowing the deceptions of the world, points not to the ſtructures of

of the great, or the palaces of royalty as the abodes of bliſs: he ſaw not only their inſignificancy, but their danger; for ſtate and ſplendor too often fill the poſſeſſor with pride, and the beholder with envy. He therefore paſſes no encomium upon riches, for they tend to corrupt the heart; he glances not at ſenſual pleaſures, for they defile the ſoul. With him people of a very different deſcription are accounted happy. The humble, who retire from a contentious multitude to the ſhade of obſcurity; the poor, who are deſpiſed by unthinking man; and the ſpiritually afflicted, who are inſulted with a pity bordering on contempt; theſe, with the Saviour of mankind, are objects of attention; theſe obtain his higheſt benediction:—"Bleſſed," ſaid he, "are the meek—Bleſſed are the poor—Bleſſed are they that mourn, for they ſhall be comforted."

The laſt ſentiment, which is the more immediate object of our preſent enquiry, contains three diſtinct particulars.

I. A deſcription of people, "they that mourn."

II. That their ſtate is a bleſſed ſtate; "bleſſed are they."

III. In what the bleſſedneſs conſiſts; "they ſhall be comforted."

I. By thoſe that mourn, we muſt not underſtand all that are ſunk in ſorrow, or are a prey to grief; there are complaints that never will be converted into bleſſings, and a bitterneſs of ſoul that will end in inconceivable deſpair. The phraſe, in common ſenſe, and its connexion in ſcripture, muſt be limited to thoſe who ſorrow after a godly ſort; and who may be eaſily diſtinguiſhed by the cauſes that gave birth to their ſorrow, the ſenſations which accompany it, and the effects it produces.

The vexation that ariſes from worldly diſappointment, which, while it torments the heart, invigorates our purſuit after vanity,

nity, cannot be bleſſed; its only fruit muſt be ſucceſſive embarraſſment, which, however relieved by a momentary delirium of hope, muſt eventually end in final dejection. Whoever ſorely laments the loſs, and yet ardently deſires the poſſeſſion of earthly things, muſt feel a pang more likely to encreaſe than diminiſh. As long as we are more intent upon the ſucceſs than the purity of our endeavours, we can have nothing in reſerve to alleviate our troubles when our attempts fail; we ſhall be the ſport of chance; and, as we ſail without a rudder, ſooner or later ſome of the hidden rocks, thickly ſcattered in the ocean of life, muſt ſhatter our veſſel; and then, irrationally railing at fate or fortune, and no friendly port even in diſtant view, a deeper and a ſtill deeper gloom will involve us. To ſuch there is no promiſe to repair their temporal loſſes, or afford in this life future ſecurity. To truſt in the world, is to inſure diſappointment; and to confine our views to ſublunary things, is to preclude the poſſibility of felicity: we muſt ſuffer,

but

but there will be no remedy; we may complain, but it will be to the wind. To ſhew how inadequate all moral conſolations are to ſuch a ſtate, and how inapplicable even the comforts of religion to the wicked, the ſcripture adopts the ſtrongeſt figurative language, as coming from the Almighty himſelf, "I will laugh at their calamity, and mock when their fear cometh."

But there are mourners of a very different deſcription, and to ſuch the paſſage alludes, "the mourners in Zion." It would convey an unpleaſing and improper idea of Chriſtianity, to repreſent it as a continued ſtate of ſorrow and dejection; that a grieving ſpirit and a ſuffering frame were the effects of the goſpel: ſo different from theſe are its ultimate operations, that peace and joy in the Holy Ghoſt are the never-failing fruits of believing. But though it be true that Chriſtianity is the only mode of attaining true happineſs, it is by no means inconſiſtent with its beneficial nature that a godly ſorrow ſhould precede its bleſſings,

and

and a ſtate of mourning and humiliation be neceſſary to prepare us for its reception. It is impoſſible that any material change can be wrought in the mind, any more than in the body, without ſome violence. As the firſt perception of light is attended by painful ſenſations in them who are recovered from blindneſs; ſo the light of truth cannot diſpel mental darkneſs without a ſimilar temporary inconvenience. The falſe notions we have previouſly entertained will be reſigned with reluctance, and habits of thinking eradicated with painful ſtruggle. To have found ourſelves in ignorance and danger can be no pleaſant feeling; and though diſcovery be in due time ſucceeded by relief, the diſtreſs will ever conſiderably precede the remedy. To be checked in our career, however ſalutary in the end, muſt be humiliating; and a ſtate of uneaſy and anxious ſuſpenſe will ever ſeparate the boundaries of conviction and conſolation. What can be more afflicting than to diſcern the purity and perfections of God, when we feel ourſelves full of depravity and de-

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filement. To behold that world periſhable in its nature and ſinking into nothing, upon which we had fixed our hope; and that judgment haſtening for which we are not prepared, and which we cannot avoid; muſt be a fruitful ſource of ſorrow, and a cauſe for deep mourning.

And that theſe were the ſpecies of mourners addreſſed, is plain, if we advert to the ſituation of the audience whom our Lord was inſtructing.

The miſſion of Chriſt was preceded, as foretold, by the preaching of John the Baptiſt; who, in the ſtricteſt exerciſe of ſelf-denial, and by a complete renunciation of all the comforts of life, endeavoured to call mankind from their ſtrong and undue attachment to the vanities of time, and convince them of their ſin and folly. As his meſſage was to awaken, he cried, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." It does not appear that he was commiſſioned to communicate that clear

revelation of the good will of the Father, and that way of ſalvation, which Chriſt was about to explain. He was ſent to turn them from the evils of the world; inſpire them with the danger of their ſinful courſes and ſpiritual ſtupidity; but to bring life and immortality to light was the ſuperior work of our Lord himſelf.

John's preaching, therefore, though highly uſeful, was not complete; it was only preparatory to a better revelation: and conſequently thoſe that were baptized of him, and even brought fruits meet for repentance, were only fleeing from the wrath to come. Filled with alarming apprehenſions of their dreadful ſituation by natural depravity, and actual guilt, they were anxiouſly and awfully looking for a deliverer which they had not yet ſeen; and waiting for the manifeſtation of a Goſpel with which they were yet but imperfectly acquainted. In this ſtate they muſt feel a gloomy ſuſpenſion of earthly delights, though not yet in poſſeſſion of better. The preacher who had

had brought them ſo far, acknowledged his incapacity to conduct them farther. He confeſſed, and denied not, but ſaid, "I am not that light; but there cometh one after me, whoſe ſhoe-latchet I am not worthy to ſtoop down and unlooſe, he ſhall baptize you with the Holy Ghoſt and with fire." As if he had ſaid, I have awakened and alarmed you, but it is He who is mightier than I who will enlighten your minds and purify your hearts.

In this ſtate no doubt were many who attended our Lord's miniſtry; they had been baptized of John; beheld him as a true prophet; and trembled at his word, becauſe he had ſaid, that the ax was now laid to the root of the tree; they were dejected, as doubting whether the bleſſings of the Meſſiah would be enjoyed by them. But their true ſituation was better known to Chriſt than to themſelves.—Ye anxious and deſponding penitents, ye may now raiſe your drooping heads, and diſmiſs your holy fears; the Saviour you patiently waited for

is now come, and is fully fraught with power and inclination to relieve your ſufferings; for,

II. The ſtate in which you are in he deſcribes in the moſt happy terms; "Bleſſed are they that mourn."

The bleſſings of the Almighty are always certain upon the terms upon which they are promiſed; and are always ſuited to the ſituation of thoſe upon whom they are conferred. Our Lord came not to force, but to perſuade mankind to be happy; to remove the evils which they actually felt; and to ſupply the wants of which they were truly ſenſible. The bleſſedneſs of their ſtate therefore conſiſted in their fitneſs for the reception of his meſſage; for to ſuch, and ſuch only, was he ſent. He came to ſeek and to ſave that which was loſt; to the ſick and not to the whole he was a ſpiritual phyſician; it was the broken-hearted that he was prepared to bind up; and the threadbare prodigal was the object for whom he had a

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robe of righteouſneſs. By the rich and the great, thoſe that were at eaſe in Zion, was he rejected; dazzled with the gaiety, or blinded by the ambition of the world, they ſaw no form or comelineſs in him. The moral beauty of his doctrine and the future glories of his kingdom were overlooked by the ſenſualiſt, and deſpiſed by the proud.

But the ſpiritual mourners were ready joyfully to embrace what they neglected; to them the offer of ſalvation was a welcome meſſage. When they were convinced of the power he poſſeſſed, by the miracles he exhibited, they were not offended at the humility of his manner, or the poverty of his appearance. To them the ſound of "thy ſins be forgiven thee," was more welcome than an invitation to all the ſplendor and dignity the world could beſtow. None could rejoice to hear that his kingdom was not of this world, but thoſe who had been previouſly convinced that the temporal wealth and pleaſure which generally captivate the heart are inſufficient to

comfort it: and that the whole circle of earthly joys, which engroſs the mind, after deceiving and corrupting it, periſh by the conſuming breath of time; and finally leave their votaries to deſtruction and deſpair.

When ſuch mourners heard from the lips of our Saviour, that in his Father's houſe were many manſions, their hearts muſt be lifted up; for having witneſſed his power over earthly things, they could eaſily give him credit for heavenly. His appearance therefore was an immediate mitigation of their preſent ſufferings; and, as the dawn of a brighter day, inſpired them with hope and confidence. Whatever in future is certain and unavoidable, is, by an eaſy and familiar figure, commonly repreſented as now exiſting. And it is by this mode of ſpeaking that our Lord pronounces them happy. No afflictions for the preſent are joyous, but grievous; and no melancholy or ſorrow in themſelves can juſtly be termed bleſſings; yet taken in connexion with their operations, from which in the eye of reaſon they ſhould

ſhould never be diſjoined, they may wear a different complexion. The momentary evils they produce, though great in themſelves, may be completely ſwallowed up in the idea of the immenſity of that bliſs, to which they lead, and for which they effectually prepare us. Who would not behold the liberated captive, upon the point of being reſtored to eaſe and independence, as an happy object; though his fetters were not yet knocked off, nor his countenance brightened with joy? Or who would not diſcern the miſery of a king depoſed and condemned; though the royal purple yet inveſted his ſhoulders, and the inſtruments of deſtruction were yet unprepared?

Indeed, in temporal matters mankind are ready to connect the preſent with the future; and receive or reject, as the good or evil of the aggregate preponderates. When the huſbandman feels the piercing cold while following the plough, the golden harveſt alſo is taken into the account; and the pleaſing idea of a future reward, lightens

the fatigues of the preſent toil. The mariner is not delighted with the howling tempeſt, or raging ocean; but he endures them with patience, by contemplating the profits of a ſucceſsful voyage. Thus are we by nature not altogether the children of the moment, but prone to connect the preſent with ſome future period. The rigours of winter and the exuberance of autumn; induſtrious activity and accumulated riches; preparatory labour, and after compenſation, are commonly aſſociated ideas; and the advantages and diſadvantages of both ſtates conſidered together. But though the moſt diſtant periods of human life are frequently united by the efforts of reaſon, the laſt ſtage of the preſent exiſtence generally bounds the proſpect. When paſt the meridian of life, and riches and pleaſures are beheld as worthleſs or unattainable; an emancipation from care, and a ſufficiency for the wants of age, are ſought as the only comfortable retreat. Eternity, though frequently flaſhed upon the mind, is not often the conſtant and ſteady object of the underſtanding.

derſtanding. Yet without eternity be taken into the computation, it is impoſſible to form a proper eſtimate of our preſent condition. It was in reference to this, that the mourners in the opinion of our Lord were entitled to a very different appellation to that which the world were inclined to beſtow. He ſaw the near connexion between preſent humility and future exaltation; between the ſorrow of repentance and the joy of forgiveneſs; and therefore to correct the taſte of the world, and convey conſolation to the afflicted, he boldly and unequivocally pronounced a benediction, which though men were unwilling to approve, yet they were unable to controvert: for, they that received not, were nevertheleſs aſtoniſhed at his doctrine.

But notwithſtanding it was but by a figure that they were at preſent termed happy, yet the time was near at hand when their happineſs was not to be eſtimated by promiſe, but by poſſeſſion. For,

III. It

III. It is aſſerted that "they ſhall be comforted."

This is an humble, unoſtentatious, but yet a complete deſcription of happineſs. To have every anxious care removed; to have every want amply ſupplied; is a ſtate of bliſs to which the imagination of man can add little. The fancy is often employed in drawing a pleaſing picture of enraptured felicity, but its ſketches are moſtly out of nature, and cannot be realized. And even were we indulged with an unqualified grant of our own extravagant wiſhes, we ſhould often ſigh amidſt the encumbering exuberance we had heaped up; and be compelled to acknowledge our miſconception of real enjoyments, and own our utter incapacity to chooſe for ourſelves.

The love of life is deeply implanted in our nature; and the ſoul tenaciouſly cleaves to exiſtence. To continue to *be*, is the univerſal wiſh and endeavour; but in what mode

mode of being we could exiſt moſt happily, or what appendages would moſt enhance the bleſſing, we are unable with all our powers to aſcertain. Here all our uniformity ends, and the imagination wanders in a thouſand different directions. Poſitive happineſs therefore in the preſent ſtate is not a fixed and determinate object; and that negative happineſs, which conſiſts in the removal of evils, appears abundantly ſufficient to engage our preſent attention.

It is a juſt and general acknowledgment, that miſeries are thickly ſtrown in the path of human life; and that to be relieved from all its evils and dangers as they ariſe, would conſtitute no ſmall degree of felicity. Indeed, as we are formed, there ſeems a neceſſity for a want to be felt, before a ſupply can be properly reliſhed; and it is not eaſy to imagine a greater degree of ſuffering, than to be tormented with deſires that in their nature cannot, or in the event will not be gratified. All mankind at all times (except in the ſhort delirium of intoxicating pleaſures)

ſures) have wants and wiſhes; and their feelings are conſolatory or afflictive in proportion as hope preſents a promiſe, or deſpair a denial: in one caſe miſery itſelf is lightened almoſt to relief by anticipation; and in the other is inconceivably aggravated by the proſpect of continuance.

If on this ground we examine the evils which are the ſources of the mourning mentioned in the text, we ſhall find them to be ſuch as not only admit, but upon the goſpel ſyſtem muſt meet with complete relief. That depravity of nature which incapacitates them to maintain in conduct the purity they have conceived in mind, is one conſtant and conſiderable cauſe of their affliction; when they would do good, evil is preſent with them; and they are ready to cry out with St. Paul, "Oh! wretched man that I am, who ſhall deliver me from the body of this death?" But from this a complete deliverance is at hand. The ſpirits of juſt men, however clogged with imperfections here, ſhall at their great change

change be made perfect. In the whole aſſembly of the church triumphant, there ſhall not be found ſpot, or wrinkle, or any ſuch thing. At the marriage-ſupper of the Lamb, the ſoul ſhall be clothed in white; and the incorruptible body will exert all its powers in exact conformity to the directions of a purified and enlightened underſtanding.

Another ſource of lamentation to the mourning Chriſtian is, the prevalence of ſin and folly in the world. By theſe his feelings are hurt, and his peace annoyed; he muſt often be afflicted with the ſight, and injured by the effects of the crimes of others. But from the view and attacks of theſe he ſhall ſoon be removed; he is haſtening to a city where they cannot follow. "Nothing," ſaith the Lord, "that defileth ſhall enter into my holy mountain;" whatever evils he hath ſuffered, or whatever toils he hath endured, the follower of Chriſt ſhall be admitted "where the wicked ceaſe from troubling, and where the weary are

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at reſt." The cauſes that conſtituted their grief being removed, the mourning muſt ceaſe of courſe; the anxious deſires which on earth agitated their boſoms will either be wholly ſatisfied, or chearfully reſigned. Every wild wiſh, founded in ignorance of our own good, and inconſiſtent with the will of God, the illumined ſpirit will relinquiſh without regret; and every expectation, founded in right reaſon, or excited by goſpel promiſe, will be followed by fruition. No void will be left in the aching breaſt, but the broken-hearted be completely bound up: their former ſufferings have finiſhed their purifying operations; and are like a fire that, having conſumed its fuel, expires of itſelf. Our beneficent Creator in his final diſtribution will give them "beauty for aſhes, the oil of joy for mourning, and the garment of praiſe for the ſpirit of heavineſs."

But of little avail will it be to determine the true character of ſuch a mourner, or aſcertain the nature of his future comforts, unleſs

unleſs we endeavour to adopt his ſenſations, and participate in his felicity. When we only admire the beautiful leſſons exhibited in ſcripture, we are no more than unprofitable hearers of the word; it is by adopting them in our life and conduct that we become doers. But ſome may ſay, that the character of a mourner is not inviting; and though ſuch, from the compaſſion of our Saviour, received a bleſſing, yet it may not be neceſſary for all to be in that predicament; for cheerfulneſs and vivacity are not inconſiſtent with goodneſs and morality. Far be it from the preacher to invite affliction; embitter the tranquillity of mental peace; or even check the cheering ſallies of innocent mirth. This would manifeſt a moroſeneſs incompatible with the benign influence of the Goſpel. But to communicate truths, however unpleaſant; to remove deluſions, however infatuating; and to turn the mind from agreeable trifles to important concerns; is not only the part of duty, but an office of kindneſs: for, "by the ſadneſs of the countenance" (ſhould

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theſe diſcoveries produce it) "the heart is made better." For this purpoſe I would adviſe you to ſuſpend a moment even the allowed enjoyments of life, and become ſuch mourners as are deſcribed in the text; their grief is not only rational, but profitable; for the tear that moiſtens the eye on account of ſpiritual evils, will alſo refine the mind for ſpiritual enjoyment.

To excite theſe ſalutary, though mournful ſenſations, let us narrowly inſpect our own hearts; call up to remembrance all the evils we have committed, all the opportunities we have neglected; the review of our ſins may be grievous, but their recollection will fortify againſt ſucceeding temptations.

Let us compare the length of paſt time with the ſmall ſtock of actual improvement; if the compariſon produce not immediate joy, it may increaſe future activity; if we cannot dwell with delight on the retroſpect, it will at leaſt inſpire reſolutions

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to live hereafter as redeeming the time. Such an inveſtigation does not make, but only diſcovers the cauſes for religious ſorrow; the information, however painful, is neceſſary; as we may avail ourſelves of the diſcovery, apply for mercy, and avert our ruin.

If we have never been ſhocked with our own deformity; if we have never lamented our obſtinacy and diſobedience; we have reaſon to fear that we are yet ſtrangers to ourſelves; ignorant of the nature of the Goſpel; and blind to the beauty of holineſs.

But if, from an afflictive ſenſe of our paſt feelings, we are anxiouſly labouring after newneſs of life; if it gives us real concern that the world ſhould have had ſo great, and religion ſo little influence on our heart; then is our ſorrow of a godly ſort; it will tend to weaken our paſſions, and ſecure our peace. To ſuch the ineffable ſmile of divine favour will be extended; for it is the contrite only that are promiſed forgiveneſs.

Even in the midſt of their dejection there is a hope that will ſuſtain their ſpirits: at preſent they are in a bleſſed ſtate, for they are in a ſecure one. And the time is not far diſtant when every ſource of ſorrow ſhall be dried up for ever; when the heart, duly prepared by its previous affliction, ſhall be filled with a joy, whoſe nature bids defiance to the ſtrongeſt efforts of language; whoſe greatneſs ſoars where conception cannot mount; and whoſe duration is not ſubject to the limitations of time.

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SERMON XX.

Preached at ALHALLOWS ON THE WALL, LONDON, Nov. 28, 1790; occaſioned by the Death of the Rev. Mr. JOHN GARNONS, Curate and Lecturer of the ſaid Church, and of ALHALLOWS BARKING.

PSALM xlviii. 14.

For this God is our God for ever and ever; he will be our Guide even unto Death.

THE laſt end of man ſhould be his firſt conſideration; for no part of life can be ſpent with propriety and wiſdom, unleſs we have an eye to the whole period of our exiſtence. To act without deſign is folly, and to form a plan without adverting to all its conſequences is defective reaſon. If therefore the preparation for death be excluded from the conduct of life; our views

are too confined to comprehend our higheſt intereſts. It is by general, and not a partial attention, that we can draw concluſions, which will ſtand the teſt of experience. In all our calculations, when the moſt diſtant effects are not contemplated with their cauſes, we are building on the ſand; the ſtorm, though we do not diſcern it at preſent, will come; the houſe muſt fall; and the unwiſe owner inevitably ſuffer loſs.

To mankind in general there cannot be a more unpleaſant thought than that of their own diſſolution. As their theatre is earth, and all their joys are mortal; as their pleaſures depend on the precarioufneſs of health, and their hopes ceaſe with the pulſe of life; Death is the ſole arbiter of their fate: he can deſtroy all their poſſeſſions, he can annihilate all their proſpects. Therefore reflection upon their laſt hour, even when conſidered as diſtant, caſts a temporary gloom over their brighteſt ſcenes, damps their deareſt delights, and infallibly depreſſes their ſpirits. But if Death in contem-

contemplation is gloomy, in approach he is dreadful. Then the whole charm is at once diſſolved; every pleaſing proſpect is diſſipated, and the whole ſyſtem of things inverted; what was beheld as permanent is found fading, what was lately eſteemed delightful now appears diſguſting; and the mental eye roving in vain for the departed enchantments of ſenſe, is preſented on this ſide the grave with an univerſal blank. When the phantoms of unreal bliſs that amuſed the vain imagination of man are vaniſhed; when ſublunary views of every deſcription are cloſing for ever; the active principle of thought is forced, though reluctantly, into the awful regions of eternity. But there no ray of hope ariſes to cheer the wicked, who, in their allotted probation, have forgotten God. They, unprepared for the great change, unfit for the enjoyment of heaven, and trembling at the idea of puniſhment; will feel their minds agitated by anxious doubts, torn with tormenting diſtraction, and ſinking in inconceivable deſpair.

But from a ſtate of extreme ſuffering like this, the good man will be exempt; death is only an enemy to thoſe who are entangled in the ſnares of tranſient enjoyment, wandering wide from the path of wiſdom, and inattentive to the voice of religion. To thoſe who, reſiſting the captivating ſolicitations of ſinful pleaſures; who, in the exuberance of health, and ſurrounded with temporal advantages, have elevated their views to eternity, even the king of terrors can wear a different aſpect. Prepared for a better ſtate, and capable of higher degrees of felicity, the Chriſtian can behold his departure with tranquillity. To have all the objects of ſenſe removed, and every tie of earthly attachment broken, muſt be a ſhock to human nature; but the mind fortified by grace is able to ſuſtain it. The hopes of futurity may be powerful enough to overcome our propenſity to earth; the ſeparation of ſoul and body may be conſidered as a neceſſary tranſition, or even deſired as a beneficial change.

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The ſcriptures furniſh us with many inſtances of triumphant exultations over death, among which David is not the leaſt remarkable. He diſplays on many occaſions a ſtrong confidence in God, and has a full aſſurance that he will accompany and ſupport him in the moſt trying ſituations. The text is declaratory of this ſentiment, and exhibits the excellent nature, and the important uſe of religion. The rectification of the paſſions, and the preparing the heart for the pureſt enjoyments, are its ordinary and immediate operations; but if purſued with conſtancy it will do more, it will conſole us in the deepeſt affliction, and ſtand by us till our laſt enemy is conquered.

The words I have choſen prove this, and contain three important and diſtinct propoſitions, which riſe out of each other, and form a ſublime gradation.

I. We have the deſcription of the perſon who is able to accompliſh all we can wiſh, "This God."

II. He is brought nearer, as actually engaged in our behalf; he "is our God for ever and ever."

III. The beneficial effect of the ſacred union; "he will be our guide even unto death."

I. The exiſtence and the attributes of Deity is the foundation of all religion, the baſis of all our hope: if we have any doubt of theſe, there is nothing whereon to build. We are therefore frequently called upon by the inſpired penmen to review the works of the Almighty, in order to be confirmed in the opinion of his exiſtence, and have proper notions of his attributes. The uniformity of nature, as well as the concurrent teſtimony of ſcripture, declare that there is but one, the only living and true God. But the lamentable depravity of men, and their neglect of the primitive worſhip and adoration of their Maker, had introduced falſe and confuſed notions of Deity. The heathens, in their repreſentations, had limited

mited the powers and confined the operations of God to place and circumſtance; they multiplied the names of Deity, and at laſt ſuppoſed many to exiſt; all with different ſpheres of action, bounded more or leſs in their nature and extent. With the worſt and moſt degrading propenſities of ſinful man they inveſted the idols they worſhipped; and private or provincial bleſſings were all they either prayed to receive, or eſteemed their gods capable of beſtowing.

To call mankind from this ſtupidity and blaſphemy, the divine communications were afforded, and the ſacred leſſons never fail to ſtrike at the root of the evil.

God is ever repreſented as creating and governing the whole earth; the wonders he has wrought are made frequently to paſs in review before us to remind us of his Omnipotence. The ſecret deſigns of men are expoſed, and the events of futurity foretold, to convince us of his Omniſcience: and his Wiſdom and Goodneſs are manifeſted

feſted by the order of his works, and the multitude of his mercies. David, in the former part of this pſalm, had been reviewing the power and benevolence of God; and, glancing at the ignorant and inſufficient conception of the world with reſpect to their contemptible deities, he exultingly cries out, "This God." And indeed it is eſſentially neceſſary for all, who would lay the foundations of true religion, to have worthy and exalted ideas of the Moſt High, both with reſpect to the unity of his perſon and the univerſality of his government. But,

II. There is a neceſſity, in order to enjoy the comforts and conſolations of religion, to appropriate the general mercy and goodneſs of God to ourſelves in particular; to conſider the beneficial operations of the Almighty as extending to us individually. Therefore David follows his general deſcription of God with a particular application to his own people and himſelf, "This God is our God." The flouriſhing ſtate of Jeruſalem; the many ſignal deliverances and

and divine interpoſitions by which their proſperity and ſecurity had been accompliſhed; were fruitful themes for the royal Pſalmiſt; and of which he frequently avails himſelf to ſtrengthen his own faith, and revive the declining zeal of his rebellious nation. Their pious anceſtors had been peculiarly called to witneſs his miraculous manifeſtations to mankind; and therefore with the higheſt propriety he uſes the term, that "this God is our God." The God of Abraham, Iſaac, and Jacob, was one of his known and acknowledged titles; and the inſtances of his ſupernaturally appearing in their favour, were always adduced to inſpire their gratitude and excite their obedience.

We indeed cannot trace our pedigree as the immediate deſcendents of the favoured patriarchs according to the fleſh; but we ſhould remember, that it is to the ſpiritual ſeed that the ſpiritual bleſſings are promiſed. It was neceſſary as a vehicle for the fulfilment of the prophecies and the preſervation

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of the oracles of truth, to ſelect a family and people from the reſt of mankind; but the eternal mercies of God are not circumſcribed within ſuch confined boundaries. He hath given a meaſure of grace to every one; and not only the Jews according to the fleſh ſhall grace the ſecond coming of Chriſt; but he ſhall alſo have the heathen for his inheritance, and the uttermoſt parts of the earth for his poſſeſſion. To him that is of an humble and a contrite heart will he look, and his bleſſing ſhall ſurely attend thoſe that tremble at his word.

Therefore the triumph of David was not peculiar to him or to his nation, but belongs to all who with humility and faith embrace and hold faſt the principles of the everlaſting Goſpel. It is this conſtitutes the difference between an Iſraelite indeed, whoſe religion has a conſtant and prevailing influence on his heart; and an outward court worſhipper, who is only hiſtorically acquainted with what God has performed for others. The world, at leaſt the profeſſing

feſſing world, believe in the power, and goodneſs of God, acknowledge the wonders he has performed for Iſrael, and admire the bleſſing and protection beſtowed on favoured individuals: but it is the true Chriſtian alone that traces the remote manifeſtations and interferences of the Almighty to himſelf, and diſcovers that, as all his diſpenſations were preparatory, and eſſential parts of his grand ſcheme of ſalvation, they were afforded for the equal benefit of all who in any age believe and obey. Then, he not only perceives aſtoniſhment in his mind at the wiſdom and immenſity of the divine operations, but feels gratitude in his heart for his own intereſt therein. Admiration will be accompanied with comfort, and the language of David perſonally appropriated, that "this God is our God for ever and ever." But,

III. The beneficial effect of beholding God in this character will be, that "he will be our guide even unto death."

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It is an ineſtimable bleſſing, and the excluſive privilege of a Chriſtian, to conſider God as his eternal friend; that all his promiſes reach to himſelf; and that ſalvation, upon the allotted conditions, is open for his acceptation.

But the weakneſs and frailty of man requires ſomething more. "Surely," ſays David, "I had fainted, unleſs I had hoped to ſee the goodneſs of the Lord in the land of the living." However great and glorious we may conſider our heavenly portion hereafter to be, it would have but a weak operation upon our preſent feelings, if detached from all ſpiritual ſupport and aſſiſtance in this life.

We naturally look for bleſſings near and immediate; and without ſtrength and comfort derived from them, we ſhould be unable to avoid temptations, or withſtand the fear of death. And therefore God is declared to be near unto us; he is repreſented

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as leading us ſafely through a perplexed wilderneſs, and ſupporting us firmly in the valley of death.

The actual and immediate communications of divine direction, is a doctrine not often handled, not much believed, and not unfrequently ridiculed. But the ſcripture declares its exiſtence, the church has ever been zealous for its reception, and the moſt exemplary Chriſtians have ſtrongly confirmed it by their experience.

It is true, that the book of nature is open to all, and the works of God are clear and ſtrong evidences of his wiſdom and power: and the volume of inſpiration is ſufficient to exhibit his moral perfections and purpoſes of grace. Theſe are the plain and primary directories for our faith and practice; but it does not follow that they are the only vehicles of ſacred information. Surely it may be conſiſtent with the plan of the Almighty, and beneficial to the ſtate of man, that the ordinary means of information,

mation, when fully and faithfully received, ſhould be followed with the ſecret and conſolatory influence of the Holy Spirit.

It cannot be expected that the ſuperior privileges of advanced Chriſtians can be ſatisfactorily proved, or fully explained, to any who are ſcarcely initiated in its firſt principles. There are ſublime parts in every ſcience, with which beginners cannot be acquainted. In religion alſo there is a ſcale and order of improvement that cannot be diſpenſed with. The fear of the Lord is the firſt principle, and it is juſtly doubted if any who have not learned that leſſon can have clear views of ſubſequent truths. But to thoſe who tremble at his word his mercy will be ſoon conſpicuous, the conditions of acceptance will be underſtood, and a ſeries of uſeful and advancing truths be unfolded to the mind, till it be capable of more ſublime and higher inſtruction. And ſuch is promiſed; "he will manifeſt himſelf to them as he does not to the world." St. Paul ſpeaks of a more

more ſure word of propheſy. And indeed the wonderful compoſure, and even joy, that ſome have exhibited in their laſt hours, can hardly be reſolved into any cauſe leſs powerful, than immediate ſupport from the Almighty.

The hour of death is the grand dread of the world; it is the laſt trial of a Chriſtian: while the former is utterly diſmayed, the latter can meet it with tranquillity; for he beholds the remedy connected with the diſeaſe. When the awful hour arrives, nothing but the idea of divine ſupport and direction can ſuſtain our ſpirits and inſpire our hope. And that this will, we have had many proofs, even in our age of luxury and infidelity.

In the departure of real Chriſtians we may diſcern that patience under ſevere ſufferings, and that ſubmiſſion to the divine will, which are unequivocal evidences of a firm reliance on God, and a bright view of eternity.

But of all the inſtances of reſignation that I have ſeen, none have been more conſtant and complete than that of your late worthy Miniſter, whoſe loſs we are now called to commemorate, and which all, who were acquainted with his worth, muſt deplore.

Some, indeed, I have ſeen, whoſe flame of devotion ſeemed more lively, and whoſe profeſſion was more glaring; but none whoſe ſpirit was more meek, or whoſe faith was more ſteady.—The ſacred leſſons which he publicly adminiſtered to you, were thoſe upon which he had previouſly formed his own conduct. For much as he was beloved and admired by his congregations, ſtill more was he venerated by thoſe who had opportunities of a nearer inſpection; who knew not only the regularity of his life, but the goodneſs of his heart.

During a ten years intimate acquaintance, neither his excellencies or defects could eſcape obſervation:—of his worth I had

had a thouſand inſtances; but for defects, I never knew a character from whoſe merit ſo little was to be deducted for human frailty.

A deſire for knowledge, and a love of virtue, were early implanted in his breaſt, and ſeemed to grow up equally together.

A quickneſs of diſcernment, and cloſe application, enabled him to attain a height of excellence in the walks of literature, which, if publicly known, would have gained him an extenſive reputation. But, except in the line of his duty, he ſeemed ſtudiouſly to ſhun the eye of the multitude; but his heart was generous, though his manner was reſerved.

He had no ambition to ſeek general applauſe, as he eſteemed it no certain criterion of merit: he knew that it was often beſtowed where it was leaſt deſerved, and ſometimes withheld where it was juſtly due.

The acquiſition of knowledge afforded him a ſublime gratification; and the participation of it, where it could be uſeful, was a pleaſing employment: but he was far above the vanity of wiſhing to appear learned, and therefore never ſtooped to court applauſe by the exhibition of talents. He knew it was neceſſary for the ſucceſs of his miniſtry to maintain the character of a good man, but with reſpect to the public opinion of his abilities he was not ſolicitous.

His doctrine was ſound, and his language perſpicuous; for, though general knowledge was his purſuit, he laboured particularly to acquire the cleareſt notions of the myſteries of godlineſs; and ſo far ſucceeded, that, while thoſe whoſe opinions were ſimilar to his own praiſed his perſpicuity and preciſion; thoſe who, in ſome meaſure, differed from him, acknowledged the ſoundneſs of his arguments, and the excellence of his manner. I am ſure that moſt, I think that all our converſations

turned

turned upon ſubjects uſeful and ſerious: he ſeemed to have a natural propenſity to topics of ſolemnity and importance; and at every interview he had ſomething to communicate of improvement in ſcience, or advancement in moral and religious information. He had a deep ſenſe of the infirmities of human nature, and the defects of human knowledge; and was ever ready to ſet his ſeal to the truth of St. Paul's obſervation, that "in this world," with reſpect to eternal things, "we ſee, as it were, through a glaſs darkly;" but yet he ſaw it needful that we ſhould hold faſt the plain and important truths of the Goſpel; thoſe which point out the neceſſity of conſidering this world as inferior and preparatory to another. He ſaw clearly that we had evidence enough of the wiſdom and goodneſs of God in preſent and temporal things, to induce us to truſt in him for the management of thoſe future and conſequential concerns of the ſoul, which we cannot now fully comprehend.

In one of our laſt converſations, when reflecting upon a tender partner and a riſing offſpring that ſtood in need of his protection and ſupport, he expreſſed a deſire of being reſtored to health; but concluded with obſerving, that God, who has a more comprehenſive view of things than our confined obſervation affords, knew what would be for their general good, and he had no doubt but that, in the final event of his viſitation, mercy and goodneſs would be the conſequence.

I cannot omit here to mention an anecdote, which ſtrongly ſhews his moderation with reſpect to the things of this world, and his attachment to this congregation.

In the late vacancy for Biſhopſgate, he was early applied to by ſome reſpectable and leading people of that pariſh to ſtand a candidate for their lectureſhip; but upon the beſt of principles he declined, though they aſſured him of at leaſt a fair probability

of

of ſucceſs. By ſuch an exchange he would have enlarged his income and leſſened his labour. But the ſtruggle of conteſt was unpleaſant, and he conſidered that if he failed it muſt weaken your eſteem; and though his income would have been ſecure, he was unwilling to hazard, what he conſidered of more value, the good will of a congregation, to whom in a temporal and ſpiritual connexion he held himſelf bound. And I muſt add, that he was not even here unrewarded; for your affection for his perſon, aſſiſtance in his diſtreſs, and anxiety for his recovery, were no ſmall conſolations in his affliction.

He beheld your tender regard as an ample and unequivocal teſtimonial of the uſefulneſs of his ſervices.—The office of a miniſter is an awful and reſponſible ſituation; and the love and eſteem of his hearers muſt, with a good man, ever be among his firſt comforts. This you are convinced he poſſeſſed, and this he muſt be conſcious he deſerved; for he not only underſtood, but

heartily embraced the principles of that Goſpel he delivered to you.—To thoſe who knew him not, the character may appear extraordinary; but it is literally true. I have delivered what I know, and what many of you know alſo; what numbers can confirm, and none contradict.

If we would poſſeſs his confidence in God, and inherit his reward, we muſt follow his ſteps. This God, in whom he truſted, is the rock of ages, the ſame yeſterday, to-day, and for ever: he, if we call upon him, will be our God; for an acknowledgment of our guilt and a ſenſe of our wants are the ſole recommendations to his mercy.

Let us not defer our application a moment, nor halt between two opinions. The change that has paſſed upon our friend muſt paſs upon us; a change beyond the powers of language, and far ſurpaſſing our conceptions. The ſable garments that mark us as mourners in the world, are but a faint

repreſentation

repreſentation of the deeper gloom which inveſts the mind at the awful hour of diſſolution. All the ties which, by different relations, connect us to the world, are then ſuddenly diſſolved; and the ſoul is left to combat with its own fears, or be conſoled with its own hopes. The efforts of friends and enemies are equally unavailing; the malicious cannot encreaſe, nor the merciful diminiſh our ſuffering. To the ſwimming eye the ſplendor of a court and the filth of a dungeon are alike; nothing can either delight or diſguſt the ſenſes; abſorbed in eternal things, the departing ſpirit hath no attention to beſtow on inferior concerns.

In ſuch extremity, happy is the man who has a ſupport more than mortal; who has a hope extending to eternity; yea, happy is the man whoſe God is the Lord.

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